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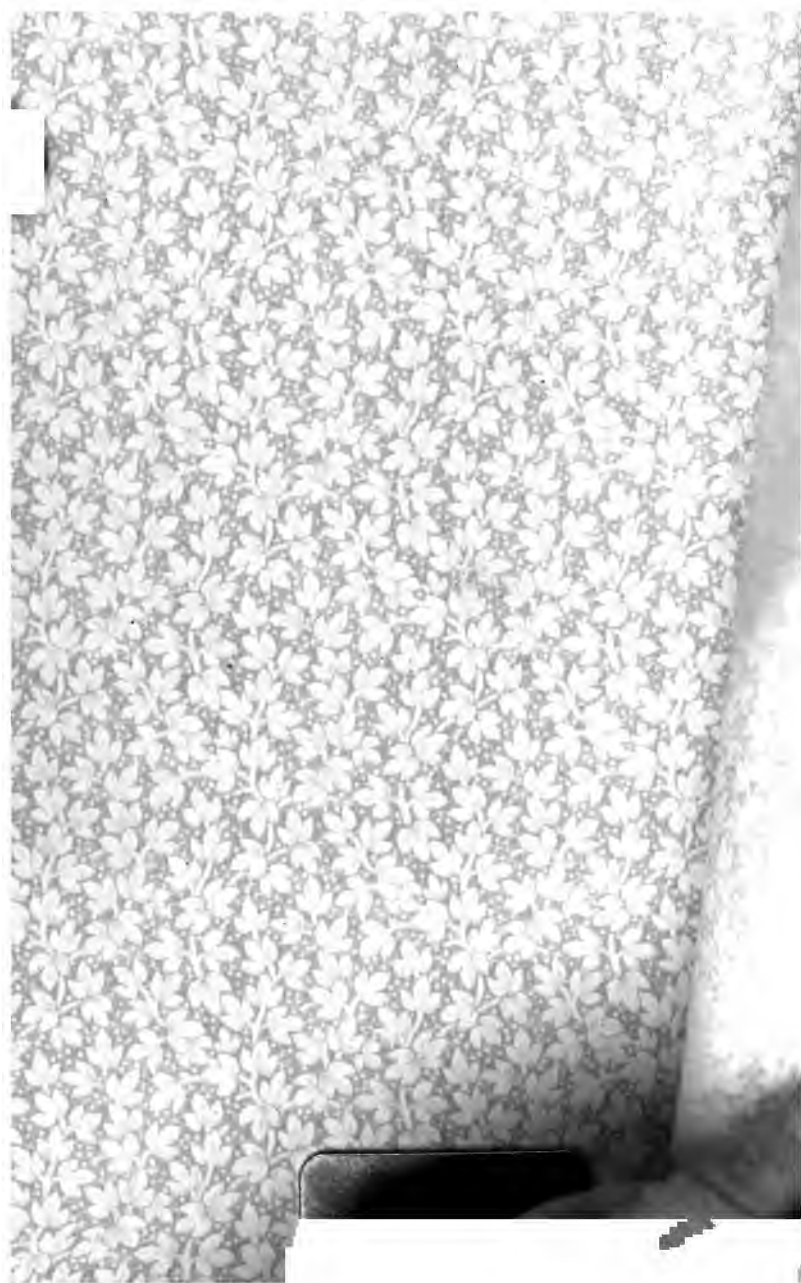
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HONEST
DAVIE







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HONEST DAVIE.

A Fable.

BY

FRANK BARRETT,

AUTHOR OF

'LIEUTENANT BARNABAS,' 'A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON :

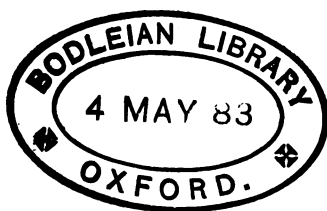
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HONEST DAVIE.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH DAVIE IS PUT TO SHAME.

WE left the library, and soon after Lord Kestral and Mr. Bond withdrew from our society, and we lost sight of them. As I found out later, they spent upwards of an hour in the private room at the Crown and Sword in Maplehurst village.

About an hour before dinner Lord Kestral reappeared alone, and made himself very agreeable to the ladies who

were practising archery upon the lawn, by his gallantry, and to the gentlemen, and Davie in particular, by a genial and unpretentious manner, which was as unlike his ordinary habit as white from black. Coming to me, he expressed surprise and distress to find that I carried my arm in a sling, and begging me to tell him how I came by my hurt, he laid his hand on my shoulder, and led me a little way apart.

‘For God’s sake, George,’ said he, when we were out of hearing, ‘forget any slight I may have put upon you, and give me what assistance you can. Let us slip into yonder alley, where we can talk privily.’

As we turned into the side-walk, which was screened from the lawn by a yew hedge, I caught sight of Randolph Bond sneaking out of it by the farther end, with his head in his shoulders and his hands in

his breeches-pockets. I directed my uncle's attention to him.

' 'Tis his way—a sneaking, shamefaced, spiritless dog!' exclaimed he bitterly. 'When he sees the company gone, and fancies they're seated at table, he'll go into the house and take a place. 'Tis a mean, slavish, obstinate, senseless, pig-headed brute; and I would to Heaven he had never come in my path!'

He was silent until his anger subsided; then he said :

'George, do you think Adams is in earnest? Do you think he will carry out his threat, and hand over my acknowledgments to Cohen if that d——d Randle misbehaves?'

'I am certain of it; I feel sure that he will keep his word.'

'But don't you think, nephew, that if you pointed out to him the injustice of making

me responsible for the conduct of that whelp, who is not even my son, he would be a little more reasonable?’

‘I don’t see any injustice to point out to him.’

‘What, George! would you have me made bankrupt, and cast in prison for the rest of my life, just because my step-son won’t do as I bid him? I can’t force him to hold his tongue.’

‘Mr. Adams is no more than just in putting the responsibility upon you; for Randle Bond would never have offended or given trouble to Mr. Adams without your instigation.’

‘I made a mistake—I own it with contrition. I am willing to ask Mr. Adams’s forgiveness for what I have done. I thought the fellow had a just claim to his father’s money.’

‘And you made him think so, also.

Well, now that you know you were in error, it is your duty to undeceive him.'

'That's what I've been trying to do for the last two hours, but the obstinate brute won't be persuaded. It don't suit him to believe it. He gets nothing by it. It does not matter a snap to him whether Adams destroys the papers or hands them over to Cohen. He has no money to lose. He is still a minor, and 'tis I who must pay his debts.'

'You led him to incur them.'

'That has nothing to do with it!' cried my uncle, clenching his fists in vexation. 'The ungrateful wretch would like to see me thrown into prison. He's as rebellious as an Irishman. He will have it that the offer of money to keep your aunt in a decent position—which is, of course, no more than she has a right to as old Bond's widow—is a bribe that I have accepted for my own in-

terest. He won't believe a word in Adams's favour. All he says is, "Let him show the will and prove his right;" and this he repeats till he puts me in a passion. And between you and me there's reason in his doubts; for if that will exists, why should Adams refuse to show it? Why, if it gave him even more property than he has, why did he not produce it when Bond's widow played him false? Have you ever seen the will?"

'No.'

'Has he ever explained to you why he has not produced it, and taken legal possession of that which he now holds against the law?"

'No.'

'Begad!' said he, after a moment's reflection, 'it looks as if he were lying. 'Tis a punishable offence to suppress a will of any sort. What mortal reason could

he have for concealing it, at the risk of being accused of dishonesty?’

‘For some good and unselfish reason, I will wager my life,’ said I.

He made no reply, but walked along in silent cogitation. I believe he was weighing the advisability of turning even now against Davie. It was impossible that a man so devoid of generosity could believe in any one foregoing a substantial advantage from a generous motive.

‘I wager that sly devil’—he referred to his wife—‘knows all about it,’ said he thoughtfully. ‘But I suppose I mustn’t even ask her now, for fear of losing the provision Adams promised. Begad, I’m hemmed in on every side!’

At this moment a servant entered the walk, and perceiving us, came and said that dinner was served. We hastened towards the lawn to join the company.

‘There’s no time for consideration,’ said my uncle on the way. ‘We must do our best to prevent Randle causing annoyance at the table. I shall look to you to help me, George.’

‘Willingly,’ said I; ‘a servant shall be stationed at the door to forbid his entrance to the house.’

‘That will never do. He’ll go to London at once. There’s a rascal of a lawyer who has promised to aid him, and before a week’s out I might have to give up the little property at Southgate, and be left with never a farthing to meet Cohen’s claim, at the end of the month. Begad, I wish everyone was at the devil! Look you, George—you must get o’ one side of Randle when the ladies leave the table, and I’ll get t’other, and we must divert him between us; and for the Lord’s sake, keep the wine out of his way.’

Davie gave his arm to Lady Kestral, and led the way into the house, and I followed with my sweet Delia; and presently we sat down to dinner as merry a party as needs be.

I never saw Davie in a happier mood, and his guests seemed fully to share his good-humour. The ladies were well pleased to find themselves in the company of a lord and his lady—for though of good substantial families, there was none with a title—and the gentlemen were one and all pleased with Davie's readiness to fall into their views and give their schemes pecuniary support. Every one of them was prepared to let him have a hunter for half its value, and support his election to the County Clubs; and they began to beg the pleasure of drinking wine with him before the first cover was removed.

Lady Kestral charmed everyone with her sprightly wit, her courtly grace, and affability, and completely eclipsed my Delia, who

was unworthily neglected, as it seemed to me ; for sure, her modest fancies and simple manners were far more admirable than all the studied art and modish attainments of my aunt. But my Delia seemed to desire no other homage than I paid her; and though I was at first vexed to find all eyes and ears turned to my aunt, I quickly forgot my jealousy in the pleasure of having my sweetheart's undivided conversation.

It was not until at a signal from Miss Dobson she rose from the table, to my great regret, and left the room with the rest of the ladies, that I bethought me of Mr. Bond and my promise to Lord Kestral. Glancing then down the table, I perceived the young man seated at the farther end still busy with his plate.

‘ Come, gentlemen, draw together, and let the bottle pass,’ said Davie cheerfully.

There was a general movement, in which

I contrived to change my place, and take a seat upon the right of Mr. Bond; Lord Kestral was seated on his left.

‘I am telling Mr. Bond about the old times, George,’ said my uncle, leaning back and speaking across the round shoulders of his step-son, who now had his arms on the table and was fingering his wine-glass; ‘in your mother’s time, you know, twenty or five-and-twenty years ago. That was before your father fell ill; you were quite a youngster then. At that time your father was fond of society, and many a pleasant gathering I’ve seen in this very room. I have tried in vain to recognise a familiar face here.’

‘With Borbonius, my lord,’ said Drench, in his most professional tone, speaking from the other side of the table, ‘we must say, “Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.”’

‘Very true, sir; “mutamur in illis,”

just so,' said my uncle. 'You know this part of Kent well, sir?'

'I should, my lord, for I have practised in it for the last twenty years.'

'I hope that has nothing to do with the disappearances of Lord Kestral's former acquaintances, doctor,' said Mr. Rogers, who sat beside Drench.

Lord Kestral professed to be hugely tickled by the joke, and the conversation became general amongst us four ; but Randolph Bond remained silent, and hung over his glass, casting his sluggish eyes occasionally up the table towards Davie, and, as it seemed to me, giving his sole attention to what was going forward there. The wine was good, and the country gentlemen showed their appreciation of it by drinking deeply. Davie himself drank freely. There was a great deal of toasting, and everyone's tongue was wagging save young Bond's, though he

drank his full share of the port, and more.

‘Trouble you for the bottle,’ was all he said, and these words were usually accompanied with a scowl at me or Lord Kestral, who had removed it from his side. It was not long before he saw that we were trying to put a check upon him, and this he showed by emptying his glass more frequently and demanding the wine in a querulous insolent tone. Drinking, which excited others, seemed only to render him more sullen and heavy. ‘The more drunk he gets the safer he will be,’ thought I; and I made no further attempt to keep him sober.

After-dinner talk amongst men is scarcely ever brilliant, and to me that afternoon it seemed more stupid and inane than usual. The ladies had left the drawing-room and gone into the garden; the sound of their voices and light laughter came through the

open windows. I looked at Randolph : his head was lower over his glass ; I could not see his eyes. I fancied he was completely besotted, and might with safety be left. Besides, it was clear he would get drunk as he chose. Then I looked at Davie, and thought that the sooner he left the table the better it would be for him. If I moved, perhaps he would move also, and so break up the bout. With this thought I was on the point of moving back my chair, when suddenly Randolph called out in his shrill, high voice :

‘ You are mighty generous, Mr. Adams !’

I believe Davie had been promising to contribute to the building of an almshouse, a school, an orphanage—I had not caught which—it may have been all three.

‘ You’re mighty generous, Mr. Adams,’ he squealed again in a still higher pitch, finding that his first observation had not

stilled the babble at the upper end of the table.

There was a moment or two of silence, in which the gentlemen at the upper end looked down towards us, wondering maybe who it was who spoke, for the little wretch had not changed his position, but with his arms sprawled on the table hung over his wine. But his face was turned towards Davie, who, catching sight of the reptile eyes fixed on him, half rose from his chair, and said :

‘Is it you who spoke to me?’

‘Yes,’ replied Randolph. ‘Don’t you know me? I’m Randolph Bond, son of Bond, the silversmith, of Lombard Street, who died at Southgate ten years ago, and left a million of money behind him. He died without a will, and I’m his only son, and I haven’t a penny to bless myself with.’

‘Hold your tongue, sir!’ cried Lord Kestral, shaking him by the arm.

He took no notice of this command, but keeping his eyes steadily fixed on Davie, continued :

‘I’ll tell you why I haven’t a penny. ’Tis because my father’s fortune was stolen by a thief of a servant named Davie.’

The wine had taken away Davie’s self-command. He stood at the head of the table, trembling with anger, and unable to find words for his surging thoughts. His visitors looked from him to Randolph, and back again to him, expecting some explanation of this unaccountable behaviour. Randolph laughed harshly, emptied his glass, and put out his hand to get at the bottle. I pushed it away.

‘Bring me a bottle of wine, you fellow!’ he called to the servant.

‘Do nothing of the sort!’ cried Davie.

‘Bring me a bottle of wine, I say!’ repeated Randolph, at the top of his voice. ‘It is mine; I have a right to every cursed thing in this house. The very coat on your confounded back is mine,’ he shook his finger at Davie, ‘for ’twas bought with the money you stole from your master—you stole—you, Davie Adams, my father’s gardener!’

He screamed something else, but his words were inarticulate, for I had risen, and having hold of his neckcloth and the collar of his coat, was dragging him out of his chair.

‘Wait!’ cried Davie. ‘Let him stay, Mr. Falkland. He shall know the rights of this matter. The poor fool is less to blame than those who have set him on to this. Gentlemen all, he has told you that he is the son of Mr. Bond, the silversmith, and that he is entitled to all that I possess. He has been told so, and he believes it; he

knows no better, but nevertheless it is a lie. That young man is the——'

Davie stopped abruptly. His face, which had flushed with anger, lost colour ; a look of shame came into his eyes, and he dropped his chin upon his breast in silence.

I had seen his glance turn suddenly from Randolph Bond to some object beyond, the moment before he ceased to speak ; and now, as I turned round, I saw standing by the open door Lady Kestral, and by her side Delia, gazing in terrified astonishment at this strange scene.





CHAPTER II.

DAVIE IS DESERTED BY HIS FRIENDS.

HAVING QUITTED Randle, by whose side I was standing, and hastened to the door with the hope of getting Delia from the room before he could add to Davie's humiliation by repeating his charge in her presence. Drench and Mr. Rogers rose from the table at the same moment, and together we took the ladies out into the air.

'I'll go back and see fair play: 'tis all against one, or I'm mistaken,' Drench whispered when we were on the terrace; and he fell back and re-entered the house.

‘What is the matter, dear?’ Delia asked of me, in a tone of suppressed inquietude.

‘Mr. Bond is tipsy, and has misbehaved himself: are you surprised?’

‘No! But papa! I never before saw him look as he did when he saw us and ceased to speak. ’Twas as if he had been in fault.’

‘He lost his temper: a man’s always ashamed of that. He was in fault—and felt it, seeing you—to be moved to such a degree by the pitiful insults of a contemptible boy like Randolph Bond.’

She accepted the explanation; but I saw that she was still sorely perplexed.

Lady Kestral treated the matter in a light off-hand manner.

‘Miss Adams and I have succeeded in bringing off two gentlemen,’ said she, when we joined the group of ladies upon the lawn, ‘and we must make much of them, for we are likely to get none other for some

time. Our husbands are in their cups, and seem vastly amused with their own company.'

Voices were raised in the dining-room, Randle's shrill squeak sounding above the rest. I glanced towards the house, and saw Drench close the windows; Delia looked at me in alarm.

Mr. Rogers, to divert attention from the house, proposed that we should explore the little wood beyond the paddock, and Lady Kestral giving her voice in favour of the expedition, the rest of the ladies agreed to it very readily.

As we were moving from the lawn, Randle's voice, which we had not heard since the closing of the window, became more distinctly audible than before; and all eyes turned again towards the house. Randle was being led out of the house between two men-servants, by the side-door.

We saw him as he descended the steps turn his head and gesticulate violently, and heard him screaming abuse at the top of his voice, though happily the distance rendered his words indistinct to our ears. The men who grasped his arms were big fellows, and he had to run to keep pace with their long strides.

‘Naughty boy!’ said Lady Kestral, with mock gravity. ‘Does he not look as if he were going to be flogged?’

‘’Tis your ladyship’s son, I fear,’ said a lady.

‘Yes, I am sorry to say it is my son. He has made himself objectionable, no doubt; and Mr. Adams is right to put him out of the house. ’Tis what you yourself would do, madam, in similar circumstances. Come, don’t let his unruly behaviour interfere with our enjoyments.’

‘A servant is coming this way: he seems to have a message for one of us.’

It was the butler.

‘Lady Kestral,’ he said.

My aunt moved, and inclined her head.

‘Lord Kestral bade me inform your ladyship that he attends you in the drawing-room.’

Lady Kestral inclined her head again, turned to the ladies with raised eyebrows and an expressive shrug of her shapely shoulders, and then, with a very gracious bow of acknowledgment, took Mr. Rogers’s arm and left us.

It was agreed that we should await the return of Lady Kestral and Mr. Rogers, and so we seated ourselves upon the lawn and struggled to appear as if we were not curious to know what was going on in the house.

The butler was met upon the terrace by another servant, received a message, and

returned to us with his slow and ceremonious air.

‘Mrs. and Miss Humphrey.’

‘Here—here we are; I am Mrs. Humphrey.’

‘Mr. Humphrey attends you in the drawing-room.’

‘Tut, tut, tut! What can it be? Something’s to do, I’m positive. I expected it, I protest. Come along, Jane. You know your father doesn’t like to be kept a-waiting.’ And away she bustled.

Again we made a feeble attempt to treat the affair as a matter of course. In Delia’s presence no doubt of her father’s culpability could be expressed; but the silence of these good ladies showed that they did not view the ejection of Randle and the departure of Davie’s most important guests with unreserved indifference. Everyone was seated with an eye towards the house. Mr. Rogers returned to us, and seating himself by

Delia, continued the conversation he had begun with her. He was a man who professed to care not for women, and who undoubtedly disliked talking to them; but now, with a kindly feeling and gentlemanly tact which it pleases me to recall, he devoted himself to my poor sweetheart and lessened her embarrassment by recounting a long-winded story of his experiences as a student in Rome, which at another time he would have detested himself for mentioning. Very different was his behaviour from that of Drench, who proved himself a time-server and a sycophant at this time; for he was the first to leave the house after Randle Bond—walking off with his hat over his eyes, as if he were suddenly called to attend a patient in the last agonies.

Everyone saw him go, and significant glances and whispered comments were exchanged amongst the ladies.

The butler came again, and all ears were expectant.

‘Mrs. Bagginwold, and Mrs. and Miss Shotter——’

He was not called upon to deliver his message. The ladies rose at the mention of their names, and sped towards the house.

Then the carriages began to arrive at the side-entrance. First of all the great family coach of Mr. Humphrey, as I learnt from the sufficiently audible whispers of the neighbouring ladies, in which Lady Kestral took the first place, Mrs. and Miss Humphrey following, and Lord Kestral and Mr. Humphrey completing the load.

Mr. Rogers still sawed away at his interminable story, but I saw Delia’s eyes turned towards the carriage, and knew that she was taking to heart the significance of visitors leaving without a word of farewell to her.

The butler advanced once more, and this time pronounced a string of names that seemed to comprise the whole company, except the triad composed of Delia, Mr. Rogers, and me ; for the ladies rose in a body, and swept away without a single word to Delia. Two or three made her a stiff formal courtesy, which was more irritating than the absolute disregard of the rest.

Delia's brows contracted, her delicate nostrils whitened, and her fine eyes sparkled with anger.

'If my father's guests are leaving,' she said, rising and interrupting the monologue of Mr. Rogers, 'I must not remain here. The discourtesy shall not lie on our side.'

'Stay where you are, dear,' said I, for I feared lest she should get to know the cause of the quarrel.

She looked at me in hesitation, and then, in obedience to my wish, which was now

her law, she sat down ; but not without remonstrance.

‘What has taken place that I should be treated in this manner by those people?’ she asked.

‘Nothing very remarkable,’ said I. ‘Your father has very properly punished the insolence of a visitor by having him put out of the house ; but because the visitor chances to be connected with a peer, the rest of the visitors, in unworthy respect for his position, have sided with him, and taken up his quarrel with your father.’

‘I cannot understand anyone with right feeling doing that,’ said Delia, whose intelligence was not to be deceived by such a lame explanation.

‘Greater quarrels have arisen from smaller causes,’ said Mr. Rogers ; and he cited many wars of ancient and modern history to show how irrational and unjust

men can be whose judgment is perverted by feeling.

He offered her his arm, and we led her from the spot, he continuing his tedious disquisition, and I supporting him to the best of my ability, which I admit was slight enough ; for to talk about nothing at any time is a polite art acquired, I imagine, by long experience of society, and I had lived best part of my life in solitude. I believe Delia understood not one word that fell upon her ear ; and for my own part, the coming and going of carriages over the freshly gravelled drive and the slamming of doors occupied my mind much more than all the wars that ever were waged.

At length the banging and grinding ceased, and I thought we might safely enter the house ; so we turned about, and going by the avenue of larches, reached the lawn.

A servant mounted on a sorrel nag waited by the steps at the west entrance, and Davie, holding a packet in his hand, was giving him instructions.

The servant took the packet, touched his hat, and clapping his heels against the nag's sides, started off at a trot.

There was an embrasure in the garden wall, approached by a couple of steps, from which one could see a long stretch of the weald; and here I suggested we should sit down awhile, and enjoy the setting of the sun, for it seemed an inopportune moment to meet Davie. I felt sure that the packet given to the servant contained the papers of Lord Kestral and Randle Bond which Davie had threatened to hand over to Mr. Cohen, and guessed that Davie, to put his threat into execution with such despatch, must still be in choler.

Delia sat for a moment looking absently

at the landscape, and then she turned her eyes towards the house.

Davie was walking alone on the terrace with dragging steps, his hands behind him, and his eyes upon the ground.

‘Stay here, dear, with your friend,’ said Delia, in a quavering voice. ‘Papa wants me.’

Her eyes were full of tears as she spoke; I saw her pause to wipe them away before leaving the yew walk, and then she gave her head a little shake, as if resolved to get rid of her emotion, and went with a sprightlier gait to join her father.

Indeed, it touched my heart with melancholy to see Davie walking there dejected and alone, deserted by every friend, and with all his hopes and pleasant anticipations changed for despair and the consciousness of failure; and the place so silent and void where but a few hours before a crowd of

gaily dressed ladies and gentlemen surrounded their hospitable host, pleased with his simple manners, and joining heartily in his kindly merriment.

A tinkling sound caught my ear, and looking upwards among the boughs of the tree, I perceived that it arose from the evening breeze swinging against each other a couple of those 'additional lamps' which Davie had provided for the evening's entertainment. They seemed to be sporting with his misfortune, I thought.





CHAPTER III.

A FORESHADOWING OF DISHONOUR.

ARE they all gone?' asked a voice from the lane.

Looking down from the wall, I espied Drench.

'Yes,' said I; 'when one rat runs out of a sinking ship the rest are not long in following.'

'Well, I'm the first to come back again,' said he, laying hold of the top of the wall, and drawing himself up. 'What, Falkland, will you quarrel with me for going, when I must either have sided with that d——d old

vagabond, your uncle, or lost my practice by staying. A country doctor can't afford to be heroic. Besides, what good could I have done—curse that stone wall! it has barked my shin finely—by staying? Everyone was against poor Adams, and all were too bemused to see more than one side of the question. Hang me if I know what I could have said either, in his defence! Hang and drat that wall,' he added, carefully looking at his damaged shin.

‘What happened?’

‘When I got back to my seat, I found Adams sitting in dead silence, and looking as glum as a gib-cat. The men were whispering to each other, evidently surprised that he did not attempt to complete his justification, or accusation, whichever it was he had begun. He took no notice of the murmurs, but sat there with his hands before him, looking at your uncle as if ’twas

his turn to play. Kestral had his young bear down in a chair again, and was threatening him—I'll swear he was! It seemed as if the cloud was to blow over without any further storms; the bottle began to move again. I ventured to make a general remark, and Squire Humphrey was about to reply, when our young cub, shoving his head forward, began again :

“ You were about to tell us why I am not entitled to my father's estate,” he squealed. “ I should like to know, for it can't make my affairs worse, that's certain ; so out with it, if you're not afraid, Adams.”

‘ Without replying to his request, Adams beckoned to a servant.

“ Take that person away,” said he ; “ put him outside the gates, and tell the lodge-keeper on no account to let him come within 'em again.”

‘ The little bear looked as if he meant

to show fight ; but those strapping fellows frightened him, and he confined himself to screaming out every kind of filthy abuse he could lay his tongue to as he was led away. Kestral shrugged his shoulders, and tried to make the best of it.

“ The boy has drunk too much ; he is mightily screwed. He should know how to hold his tongue. May I trouble you for the bottle?”

‘ This to me.

‘ I passed the bottle. Adams beckoned another servant.

“ Order Lord Kestral’s coach to be brought round,” said he, without dropping his voice from its usual pitch.

‘ You may imagine the sort of commotion this caused. Everyone began talking at once, but Adams took no notice ; he sat there lowering at your uncle in dogged silence. At length, when he had got over

his astonishment, up jumps Kestral, and everyone became silent.

““You have sent for my coach, Mr. Adams; do you intend an insult?” he asked.

““No,” answers Adams; “I insult no one. But I wish you to go. That is but fair, for you are more to blame than the drunken boy whose dismissal you approve of.”

““I shall not discuss that point with you,” says my lord, turning on his heel, and bidding a servant go find his lady.

““Wait, my lord,” cries Squire Humphrey—a stupid old fool who must be dipping his finger into every pie; begad, I’ll dose him for this turn! “Wait,” says he. “If you leave this table, my lord, I leave it with you, unless Mr. Adams can justify his conduct.”

““Nothing can be much easier if our host is in the right,” says old Shotter, a Justice of the Peace, and about as witty as most of ’em.

“Does Mr. Adams deny that he owes his present estate to the fortune left by the late Mr. Bond, silversmith?”

““No,” said Adams.

““Do you deny, sir, that the said Mr. Bond died intestate?”

““He left a will bequeathing every penny of his fortune to me,” says Adams reluctantly.

““And that will can be seen at Doctors’ Commons, sir?”

““No; it is in this house.”

““So much the better. All you have to do is to show it, and clear yourself of a nasty charge, and I promise you I won’t leave your port.”

“Adams made no reply; just set his elbow on the table and dropped his jaw on his hand—like that—and waited.

““Well, sir,” said Squire Humphrey, “will you be good enough to show one of us—

Lord Kestral, for instance—this will? He assures me 'tis all he demands.”

“ I have already refused to show it to him,” says Adams, without lifting his head.

“ And you will show it to no one else?”

Adams was silent for a good minute ; then, lifting his head and looking at Squire Humphrey, he answered as quickly as you please :

“ No !”

“ Then, sir,” says old Shotter, as he tossed off his glass, “ I can no longer sit at your table.” And he got up and followed Squire Humphrey, who had sent for his wife and daughter, and was marching out of the room arm-in-arm with old Kestral. Then everyone rose and formed a procession; and the last I saw of poor Adams, he was sitting at the head of his empty table with his jaw on his hand again, and his eyes on the table-cloth.’

‘And you hadn’t the courage to go and sit down by his side?’ I asked.

‘Oh, I had the courage; but I hadn’t the imprudence. Why, man, if we were all of your kidney, we should have nothing to do but to go about begging charity. I shall be as stiff as an old horse to-morrow. What on earth could I do, I should like to know? I’m altogether of his side in my heart. Whether there’s a will or not, the money’s better in his hands than the young bear’s—though precious little he’d get of it if Kestral should be his guardian. Adams did right, any way, to feather his own nest. I’ll go and have a chat with him at once—d—— that stone!’

‘I pity that sweet girl with all my heart,’ said Mr. Rogers, when we were alone; Drench having limped off to the terrace, where Davie was still walking with Delia upon his arm. ‘She must hear of it sooner

or later, and whether her father be innocent or guilty, the effect upon her mind will be terrible. I suppose there's no hope that this story about the existence of a will has a foundation on fact ?

‘Good God ! do you think I should be here now if I thought otherwise?’

‘Hum ! After that I ought to follow the rest of Mr. Adams’s visitors, and go ; for my question implies my doubt. Truth to tell, I’m almost as worldly as your friend Drench. I can forgive Adams for not letting the money go to such a cub as that. I fancy you yourself, Falkland, believe in his honesty rather from inclination than conviction. All that pother about independence shows that you had some unacknowledged doubts which made the acceptance of his money repellent to you.’

‘No !’ said I. ‘I have never doubted Davie’s honesty ; and I doubt it no more,

now that you have suggested a bias in my judgment, than I did before.'

'You believe, in fact, this statement reported by Drench, that Adams possesses a will entitling him to the estate.'

'Yes.'

'Then how can you explain his concealment of it?'

'I believe it contains an explanation of the circumstances that led Mr. Bond to cut off his widow from the inheritance—an explanation damaging to her honour; and that Adams, to shield her from public shame, suppresses it.'

'Rather romantic,' said Mr. Rogers, raising his eyebrows, and smiling incredulously.

'It is,' said I warmly; 'Davie Adams is a little behind us in point of enlightenment.'

'I suppose one must be something of a barbarian to be romantic—that's true. It

would seem vastly incongruous for a man with a large circle of pleasant acquaintances, the pleasures of the town within his reach, and books and pictures to fall back upon, to die of a broken heart, or to sacrifice all that is dear to him for the happiness of a friend. Yet it would be reasonable enough in the case of a man like Adams—a man of simple tastes and slender mental resources, who takes as long to mature one idea as we should give to a hundred. If you could see into his mind, and were to examine it twenty times in a day, or once in a year, I have no doubt you would find always the same object of contemplation there.'

'Then you will allow the possibility of his concealing the will for this woman's sake, even at the risk of encountering shame for himself?'

'Yes; if he loved her. Do you think that your aunt has fascinated him?'

‘I believe he pities her—that’s all. He may have loved her at one time.’

‘Do you think he loves her more than he loves his daughter?’


‘Good heavens! what an idea!’ said I, laughing.

‘Does he love her better than his daughter?’ he repeated.

‘Why, can’t you see,’ cried I, ‘that he worships the very ground which Delia treads! She is all the world to him.’

‘I thought so,’ replied Mr. Rogers quietly. ‘Then you may depend upon it the will does not exist. For however romantic he may be, Adams is not a fool, and to save his daughter from unhappiness and the shadow of his own dishonour, he would produce that will though it ruined ten thousand women like Lady Kestral.’

‘The shadow of dishonour!’ I exclaimed, catching at the phrase—for it was the first



time I had ever thought of my Delia sustaining injury from the suspicion that rested on Davie—‘the shadow of dishonour! Whatever the consequences of Davie’s conduct may be, his daughter cannot be implicated.’

‘Of course not,’ he replied evasively. ‘You misunderstand me, Falkland;’ and then he proceeded to argue that Davie’s love for his daughter might have led him to appropriate the money; but I could not follow him, for I was busy ruminating upon the consequences to Delia of Davie’s conduct.






CHAPTER IV.

HOW RANDLE CAME TO BE THRASHED.

WE met at the supper-table, and everyone tried to act and look as if nothing had happened. It was a poor pretence, for Davie could by no effort throw off his care, and was dismal to the last degree ; and it was a relief to all of us when the time came to separate for the night.

I was up betimes the following morning, divining that Delia would like to see me early. The servants were not yet risen, but I found the little door opening upon


the terrace ajar ; and going out into the air, I perceived, at a distance, Delia walking with her father down the larch avenue in the direction of the woods. I overtook them, and we strolled together round the wood, returning to the avenue, and so slowly approaching the house. Delia looked pale and fatigued ; Davie seemed only concerned for her. I could fancy that in the night he had taken himself to task for giving way to unavailing emotions, and determined to do his best to make the burden of misfortunes lighter for Delia. He talked quite volubly for him, keeping his eye on the alert for anything that might please the girl. Now it was a squirrel that he pointed out, and now a magpie ; and here was a wild strawberry, and there some sweet thyme ; and all recalled to his mind facts and circumstances that he told in a kindly, genial manner, with a certain anxiety in his look



and tone as if he were entreating her to find happiness and contentment in such things as fate could not deprive her of. Delia was responsive ; every common flower and paltry herb he culled, she admired ; and she smiled when it was clear he wanted her to smile. She too, poor soul—as I found—had resolved to make the best of it, and be brave.

The grass was damp, so we walked by the path at the bottom of the lawn by the balustrade, and admired the look of the house, with its red-brick façade, its twisted chimneys, and quaint ornaments. There was a warm, cheerful look about it, and the sunlight sparkling on the little panes of glass made it seem to smile at us.

I think I have mentioned that among the embellishments given to the place by Davie, was a short flight of broad steps of white marble, which formed a descent from the terrace to the lawn. Now, as I looked



towards the house, my eye was caught by what seemed a black stain upon the surface of the lower step. The position and distance prevented me from seeing more. It was a trifle, but it excited my curiosity. Turning to Davie, I found that he also was regarding it with a look of perplexity, and at the same moment Delia asked :

‘What can that be on the steps?’

‘That’s just what’s puzzling my pate,’ said Davie. ‘You stop here, dear—the grass is mighty wet—and I’ll go across and find out.’

We stopped in the path while he marched across the grass, and approached the mysterious stain. Suddenly, at about a dozen paces from the steps, he stopped short, as if he had been struck a blow. He stood silent and motionless for a minute, and then he turned quickly to the right and to the left, as if in search of some one ; finally he called

aloud to Bishop, the gardener, who was taking down the little lamps from the trees.

‘Let us cross and see what it is. My shoes are quite thick,’ said Delia ; and with an apprehension of mischief which Davie’s altered tone produced, we crossed the lawn. Within a yard of him we also stopped abruptly, for we read this word, painted in great black letters on the white stone:

‘THEEF.’

Delia trembled as she hung upon my arm. I knew then that she had learnt of the charge against her father. We did not speak. Davie did not turn to look for us ; we were forgotten. We waited in anxiety while the gardener slowly plodded, in the manner of gardeners, over the lawn in obedience to his master’s summons.

‘Who did that?’ asked Davie, pointing to the step.

‘Goo’ Goramighty!’ exclaimed Bishop, screwing up his eyes, and drawing near. ‘It’s pitch letters, too, sir. ‘T-H-E-E-F, thief! Goramighty!’

‘Who did it, I say?’ said Davie, more angrily than before.

Bishop looked up at him in blank astonishment, and then, turning his round eyes askant at the steps, he shook his head, rubbed his hands slowly on his breeches, and replied in a subdued voice:

‘I d’n’ know, sir, for sartin sure!’

‘Then you must find out; and there’s ten guineas for you if you find out before noon.’

‘They’re a-pitchin’ the pales at Grigsby’s, as I happened to see only yesterday morning as I was passin’; and like enough it’s clever Jollocks, which is a daring young hound as knows the stocks as well as e’er a drunken tinker in the county. I’ll have him—a young toad!’

Davie turned away, and, dropping his head, he said bitterly :

‘ They *won’t* leave me alone !’

Bishop went off with the under-gardener, who was to play the part of false witness, in order to ensnare clever Jollocks into confession ; and so well did the two execute their plan that in the course of an hour they returned to the hall, bringing the culprit with them, black-handed. It had required very little bounce to make him confess, but he prudently reserved his defence. He was taken into the library, and there Davie and I found him, with his hat in his hand, standing in an attitude of submission, which showed that he was not unaccustomed to the ways of justice, and quietly noticing all that was going forward out of the corners of his sly eyes.

‘ Did you paint those letters on my steps ?’ asked Davie.

‘Guilty, your worship.’

‘When did you do it?’

‘Half-past three this morning, your worship.’

‘And why did you do it?’

‘I was paid to do it, your worship.’

‘Who paid you?’

Clever Jollocks, who had answered glibly enough up to this, now held his tongue; and upon the question being repeated, replied in a snuffling whine :

‘Better put me in the stocks at once, your worship.’

‘The person who paid you to do this sorry trick is to be punished, not you,’ said Davie.

‘Don’t you hear, Jollocks?’ asked the gardener, after waiting a few moments for the youth to speak. ‘The master don’t want to set you in the stocks ; he’ll let you off if you tell un who egged you on.’

‘Put me in the stocks,’ snuffled the culprit.

‘Lazy young toad! ’tis no punishment to you to be set in the stocks. You’d rather sit there a whole day than do an hour’s work.’

‘Well,’ said Davie, ‘if he prefers to take the punishment, he shall have it. Go and cut me a stout hazel.’

The second gardener left the room to execute the order.

Clever Jollocks seemed unmoved by the prospect of a thrashing. He kept his head down in silence, and the expression of his face did not alter.

‘He’s got a hide,’ whispered Bishop to us, after looking at him for some time in disgust—‘he’s got a hide like a bit o’ leather. Might as well thrash a gatepost.’ Then, turning to the hopeless subject again, he asked, in such a tone as he might have used

to an unmanagable horse: 'Why won't you tell the master who 'twas as set you on—eh?'

' 'Cause the gent's going to give me a shilling to-night, if he's not found out,' replied clever Jollocks readily.

'Ah! I thought so!' growled Bishop. 'Well, if I give you these three sixpenny-bits, will you open your mouth?'

A faint smile broke over the youth's face, and he replied, with a gayer kind of snuffle:

'You give 'em to me, and see if I don't.'

Bishop put the money in his hand, whereupon he at once informed us that it was a fine young gentleman who had put up at the inn last night, who had paid him to paint the letters on the step.

'Can you show him to me?' asked Davie.

'If so be he ain't gone, your worship.'

'You shall have a crown if he isn't,' cried Davie, springing up from his chair.

‘A crown!’ exclaimed the lad with unwonted animation; ‘then I wager I’ll find him if he’s anywhere within five miles.’

Davie clapped on his hat, and we went out of the house. Delia was waiting in anxious suspense near the door. I went to her, and told her what had happened. We agreed that the fine young gentleman must be Randolph Bond.

‘And what is papa going to do with him?’ she asked, in alarm.

‘I should think he is going to thrash him,’ said I.

Hearing this, Delia was filled with womanly dread, and begged me to go and stand by her father; and though I pointed out that he alone was more than a match for a dozen such feeble creatures as Randolph, and had, moreover, the support of Mr. Rogers and the gardener, she would not be persuaded that I was not needed; and so, to set her

mind at rest, I started in pursuit of Davie.

I had a good run to catch up with them, for Davie's strides were as long as one and a half of an ordinary man's; within a stone's-throw of the inn I caught sight of him striding ahead of the party, with the stick in his hand which the second gardener had cut for clever Jollocks's back.

He went directly into the inn by the front door, followed by Mr. Rogers; but the gardener and clever Jollocks, more wary, went round to the back of the house, whence there presently arose such a hubbub as is heard in a barn when the thrashers catch sight of a rat they are hunting for.

I reached the spot at the same time that Davie, making his way through the house, arrived; and there, in the middle of the muck-yard, we found the two gardeners and clever Jollocks kneeling on Randolph Bond,

who, half buried in the rotten straw and filth, was gasping for breath. Had they been ringing a stout boar they could scarcely have exerted more strength to keep him down.

‘I caught un, your worship—I caught un!’ cried clever Jollocks; ‘was a-tryin’ to sneak out by the hop-halm, but I see’d un, and I caught un.’

‘Get off him!’ said Davie.

The three men obeyed, and Randolph lay in the filth, looking up at Davie with the most terror-stricken expression I have ever seen on mortal face.

‘Get up!’ said Davie to him.

He drew himself on his hands and knees, and rose to his feet; and a pretty pickle he was in, to be sure—his fine silk stockings, his satin breeches, and handsome waistcoat and coat, being one-half saturated with the mire in which he had been plunged, and the

rest of his person and face being all smirched and befouled, and a sight to see. He whined some sort of apology or excuse, of which the words, 'Not my fault'—'Lord Kestral'—'I was drunk,' only were intelligible to my ear.

'I shall cure you of getting drunk and acting upon bad advice,' said Davie ; and with that he took the fellow by the collar, and held him up—though Randolph, seeing his intention, would fain have slipped down into the muck again—while he administered as sound a thrashing to him as ever man received ; nor did he cease to thrash him until his stick was all splintered and broke to pieces.

'There!' said he, throwing the end of the stick aside and dropping Randolph, howling, upon the litter, 'I've done with you ; but mark me well—I shall begin again if you give me cause!'

‘Lord Kestral shall know of this!’ cried Randolph.

‘Let him know!’ retorted Davie; ‘and tell him at the same time that if he were ten years younger I would serve him in the same fashion.’






CHAPTER V.

OF DELIA'S TROUBLE.

DELIA met us in the lane as we were returning to the Hall, her sweet countenance full of solicitude for her father. But Davie was once more tender and cheerful: in thrashing Randolph he had given a free outlet to all his ill-humours, and maybe the mere exercise had done him good. I think we were all inclined to be gay—except Delia, to whom it was an effort to appear careless—for though the pleasure be somewhat brutal, it is nevertheless a pleasure that most English-

men experience to see a sneaking scoundrel well thrashed.

In the afternoon Mr. Rogers took a saddle-horse and left us to pay a visit to his friend Mr. Talbot, at Sevenoaks, promising to return to us at nightfall ; and Davie inviting me to a bout of bowls, we went to the green and there played a very agreeable game—Delia sitting hard by and keeping the score. Men in good health are somewhat like coaches in good condition : an upset, at first sight, seems to have done their business for ever ; but with little difficulty they are righted, and so continue their journey at the old jog-trot, with but few marks to be found of their late disaster. But it is quite otherwise with women. And so a stranger, seeing us at our game, might never have guessed of the tumult in which we had lately played a part ; but could not have looked at Delia without perceiving the




signs of late distress. Let it not be supposed that I was light-hearted. I must have been callous indeed to have felt unconcerned, with my sweetheart looking so wan and weary. She pretended an interest in the game, but it was clearly a pretence, for her score was ridiculously out ; and now and then I caught sight of her in a moment of abstraction, when she thought we were occupied, looking inexpressibly sad.

While we were yet playing, there came the London carrier with six boxes containing the prepared clay I had ordered a week before. This was a welcome event, both to Davie and me, for it afforded us the hope of distracting Delia's thoughts from the present troubles, and cheering her with the prospect of that work which was to make us man and wife. So we threw down our bowls, took Delia between us, and calling the gardeners, set them to carrying the heavy

boxes into our fine new study, where they were presently split, and the clay taken out of its cloths and turned into the trough which had been made to receive it.

‘Bravo!’ cried Davie ; ‘I long to see you both at it, Delia in her white apron and her plain, close dress—you never looked prettier in anything, dear, than in that—and with that serious working look of hers ; and you, Mr. Falkland, scraping and digging by her side, or scanning her work, proudly as I see you often in that little tumble-down woodshed. • Bodikins! you’ll be better here. I declare it looks quite smart,’ said he, looking round him, ‘with your stools and your steps, all nice and new—and the walls and windows clean and bright, and everything ready to your hand. I wager you’re itching to begin!’

I assented, and Delia smiled faintly as she bent over the modelling stool and



toyed with the wooden tools I had given her, and which she treasured beyond everything.

‘ You’ll be able to use your right arm a little, hey, Mr. Falkland? It seems to be getting better apace. Well, I own I’m a’most as anxious as you to see the work begun. I see no reason why you shouldn’t go at it to-morrow morning, you and Delia. Early to bed to-night, and early up to-morrow. We might take breakfast at seven, then you can commence straight off at eight. And p’raps you wouldn’t mind my sitting down on the bench a bit and looking on, for I can assure you there’s nothing in the world could so delight me. Just to see the thing growing up under your hands—every hour drawing nearer and nearer to perfection, and to mark you at your work, Delia, so ardent and serious, as well you may be, for ’tis a noble and a grand thing, I take it, Mr.

Falkland,' he continued, turning to me, 'for a young woman to see the true meaning of her life, and the faculties she has, and to strive patiently to do the work intended for her well. And then what a joy to her to work with the man she loves, and help him to fame! 'Tis wondrous, to be sure,' he added, in a tone of awe, as he turned about and looked at the clay which at that moment I was covering with a cloth. "'Tis wondrous to think that this shapeless mass of earth may make you famous.'

'Ay!' cried I joyfully, 'and more than that, Davie, it will make us happy for all our days to come!'

There was a faint moan, and as I turned about quickly—for it was Delia's voice I heard—I saw the sweet girl reel for a moment, and then fall to the ground as if she had been stabbed to the heart.

I shall not attempt to describe my


emotions as I fell on my knees beside my darling, and raised her lifeless head from the ground. The living tints had gone from her face—even her lips were colourless ; her features looked set and hard, as if they were moulded in wax ; her brow was cold as marble to my lips. In my terror I thought that she was dead ; and for a moment Davie and I knelt there speechless, motionless—ourselves almost deprived of life. Then came the hope of bringing life back again to that beloved body, and while Davie rushed off to the house for restoratives and assistance, I bathed her face and temples with my cravat soaked in water, using my right arm as if there had been naught amiss with it.

I believe I cried with joy when signs of life appeared in Delia's face. She opened her eyes, and looked about her in amazement, and then, seeing the clay and the modelling stool, and the casts which during the last

week we had been arranging—it had been a prodigious source of pleasure to us—she seemed to recall what had occurred, and casting her arms about my neck, she burst into an agony of tears, kissing my lips and face 'twixt each convulsive sob. I did not then understand her passionate grief—did not imagine that the poor soul was with those kisses bidding farewell to me and all her dreams of happiness!

Davie took her up in his arms and carried her into the house; she went directly to her chamber, and I saw no more of her that day.

Drench, who had been sent for on the instant, came with his professional airs, talked a quantity of jargon that provoked me to such a pitch of impatience that I had much ado to restrain myself from telling him to his face that he was unfeeling, and no better than a charlatan, and would have



stayed by Delia's side had she not insisted upon his going. He revenged himself by sending half a dozen bottles of physic, all carefully sealed, and one protected from the light by a sheet of tin-foil.

Delia kept her room the following day.

Drench called early in the morning and again in the afternoon.

After this second visit, I followed him from the house, and twitching him by the sleeve as he was about to get into his gig, I begged to have a few words with him. We went into the side walk, and there I told him in plain terms that I took it very ill he should treat Delia's sickness as if it were of no more consequence than the fantastic complaint of a fashionable invalid.

'Well, what would you have of me, Falkland?' says he.

'I would have you lay aside your "epiphora" and laxations and nonsense,

and deal with the case honestly and clearly, as you should, seeing that it concerns the happiness of a man you are pleased to call your friend. Miss Adams would not keep her room unless something seriously affected her. Tell me in a word what is the matter with her.'

Drench was silent a moment, and then he said drily:

'Vapours.'

'What!' I cried; 'would you have me believe that she has nothing more serious than the complaint invented by fine ladies for a fashion?'

'Nothing.'

'Then what do you mean by dosing her with drugs?'

'Oh, there's nothing more deadly than peppermint, I assure you. Come, Falkland, you take an unfair advantage of your position. You first find fault with me as a

friend, and next as a physician. Which character am I to support?’

‘Both,’ said I. ‘Tell me fairly what ails my sweetheart, and I will believe you to be the best of friends and physicians.’

‘Then believe me nothing is radically the matter with Miss Adams. There’s not an organ whose function is imperfect, so far as my observation goes. But her mind is uneasy; she is fretting, and if her mind is kept uneasy, and she continues to fret, a real illness is likely to seize her. The liver will refuse to act, the digestion will get out of order, she will lose strength, and if she comes in the way of fever, or small-pox, or any other floating disease, she’ll take it. And now, to complete the business, I’ll tell you how you may cure her, for you’re the only one who can.’

I looked at him in surprise, and he, in reply to my mute inquiry, said:

‘Marry her, and that without any more d——d nonsense.’


I sat down in the embrasure of the wall where Drench left me, and there I stayed, dwelling upon what he had said, and looking at the matter this way and that, and as impartially as I could, until at length I had resolved upon the course I should take. Then I went into the house, and finding Davie alone, walking to and fro in the library, I took his arm, and we paced the room together, while I told him in a few words what was in my mind.

‘I have been speaking to Drench about Delia,’ said I.

‘I saw you at it,’ he replied, ‘but I dared not put any questions to you. Does he speak hopefully?’

‘He says she has no bodily ailment.’

‘God be praised for that! Clever man, that Doctor Drench. But, surely, sir, our



Delia would not stay away from us for nothing.

‘Drench thinks that her spirits are upset. She takes your troubles to heart. If we could make her forget them——’

‘Why, that’s what I was hoping this imaging business would do, sir; but it seems as if she’d gone off it, somehow. If it was possible to travel a bit now, ’twould do her a marvellous deal of good—Italy or Switzerland, for instance, where you can’t go a mile without expecting your calash to topple you over a precipice, and can’t sleep a wink for the fleas and fears of having your throat cut—that sort of pleasuring makes you forget your other troubles.’

‘I thought of Brighton for a week or two, or the Isle of Wight.’

‘Nothing in the world better—for enjoyment; but Lord, sir, how am I to get her away, or keep her away for a day, with the

thought of you and this clay job in her head? 'Twould seem to her like putting off your happiness so much longer—she'd never do it.'

'But supposing I marry her before we go? This trip would serve for our honeymoon, and we should come back to work with——'

'What, sir?' cried Davie, stopping and grasping my hand. 'You'll lay aside your pride and your independence, and all that? Well, I'm not surprised, for you do it for her sake, and 'tis but another proof of your love for her. Heart alive, sir, if you knew the joy this gives me! When once she is your wife, all the trouble will be over, and there'll be nought more to plague and worry us. Gad's my life! the dull hours are all gone, and the bright ones at hand. We'll be merry over this to-night. I'll send for Drench, Mr. Rogers will be here, and we four men will drink the bride-cup.'

‘Delia has not yet consented.’

‘In her heart she has, sir. I wager she has thought of such a possibility in that busy little head of hers ; and so be she hasn’t, ’tis no matter. Did you bid her jump from the top of the house, she’d do it with a smile.’

‘To-morrow, perhaps, she may come downstairs.’

‘To-morrow is too late by a day. Let me go out on the lawn, and send up a message by the maid that you would speak to her ; mark my words, sir, Delia will come to you on the instant.’

With that Davie went hurriedly from the room, and sent the maid to me, saying I had a message for her to carry to her mistress.



CHAPTER VI.

DELIA'S RESOLUTION.

HAVING despatched the maid with a message, I waited in great agitation of spirit for her reply. I could not hope to see her. I believed she was really ill, and that Drench was himself deceived, or purposely deceiving me as to her condition, for 'twas not in her nature to make ado about nothing, but rather to conceal her sufferings for fear of giving pain to those who loved her. She had learnt the sound of my footstep, and hitherto, when I walked upon the terrace, she being

in the room above, her window had quickly opened to my expectant wishes, and she appeared. But this day I had passed beneath her window a hundred times, and caught no single glimpse of her. I never suspected that she purposely avoided me, but rather that she was too ill to rise from her bed. Therefore, I was astonished when, a few minutes after sending my message, the door opened, and she herself appeared, just as Davie had prophesied.

That end of the room was dark, and I stood in the light, so in the first moment I could but see her white face, yet I was conscious that she did not smile, and she came towards me, not with her customary nimble step and arms outstretched, but with a heavy pace, and her hands hanging by her side.

I went quickly to her: I took her in my arms, and I kissed her forehead, for she had

dropped her chin upon her breast. She did not return my embrace nor the pressure of my hands when I took hers, but stood before me with her eyes upon the ground, silent and still.

‘Won’t you kiss me to-day, love?—won’t you look at me?’ I asked, in bewilderment.

She hesitated an instant; then she raised her eyes to mine with the mournfullest expression in them that ever it has been my unhappiness to see.

‘I want to speak to you, George,’ said she, with an effort to control the trembling of her lips. ‘Let us sit down.’ It was as if she had demanded this interview.

I took her to a chair, and drawing one close beside it, sat me down, mute with wonder.

‘I am glad you sent for me,’ said she, in

a low voice. 'I have been wanting to speak to you all day, but I could not find the courage.'

'And what is the grave matter you want to tell me about?' said I, assuming to be light-hearted, though God knows my heart wept as I looked at her dear face, so pale and careworn, and saw how her fingers did incessantly twine and twist together.

'I know all, George—I know what took place at the dinner-table after we left. I know why the visitors all left the house without bidding me good-bye.' She paused, and then, with a look of shame, added: 'Tis the talk of all the servants that my father is——'

She could go no further.

'That your father is accused of dishonesty?' said I, with a laugh. 'And what hen, you dear little goose? May not you

and I be wrongfully accused at any time? Is anyone safe against the arrows of slander? Who is it that accused your father? —a tipsy boy.'

'He was accused by everyone at the table. He said he could prove his innocence, but, being asked to produce the proof, he failed to do so.'

'And quite right, too. What! is an honourable man to satisfy the curiosity of a mob of bemused tipplers? Is he to defend himself against an absurd charge, as if he stood a criminal before the bar?'

'That is not it,' said Delia.

'Between you and me there need be no secret, Delia. I know by my aunt's confession that the proof of your father's innocence exists, and I know that it is to shield her from disgrace and the resentment of my uncle that he declines to show that proof. It is a long story.'

‘ I know it,’ she said ; ‘ Miss Dobson has told me.’

‘ Then you can understand your father’s motive. He believes that the money was given to him that he might repair the cruelty of Mr. Bond towards his wife. Mrs. Bond by her own act defeated that end ; your father could not employ the money to her advantage ; but there remains, in his opinion, an unpaid debt, which he must discharge. He feels it his duty to screen her ; and gratitude to Mr. Bond, pity for Lady Kestral, and a chivalrous generosity, all combine to support him in doing that duty.’

‘ That may be,’ she replied, after reflecting in silence for a space, during which I recalled Mr. Rogers’s observations, and conceived that she was considering the very objections he had raised. ‘ He may not know how dependent my happiness is upon

his good fame, or he may deem it of less importance than his duty. That does not matter. If we had the proof here before our eyes, he would still be a thief in the opinion of the world.'

'What then?' I asked.

'What then!' she echoed, looking at me in astonishment. She ceased to twist her fingers, and her hands fell wide asunder.

'Surely,' I cried, with bated breath, as I caught at the significance of this unintended - act; 'surely, you do not think that a reason for our separation.'

She had sometimes in idle moments asked me, with a witching smile, if I loved her; and now a faint reflection of that arch fond look stole over her face, and she said:

'Would you marry me though I were the daughter of a thief?'

'Aye, this very moment, were a clerk

here,' said I; and, catching up her hand, I pressed it to my lips and to my face.

'Oh, George, George, George!' she faltered, drawing away her hand; 'you make my duty hard to do.'

'Darling, I sent for you to ask if you would be my wife without further delay—' I stopped short with a woful sinking at my heart.

'Tis odd,' she replied dreamily. 'I never thought to ask why you sent for me, my mind was so full of what I have to say to you. 'Tis hard for me to speak the few words there are to say, though I have said nought else to myself these long, long hours but "George, we must part."'

I could not speak for a minute; then I cried in a passion:

'Is that what you have to say to me now?'

'Yes,' she replied, with quiet firmness; 'George, we must part.'

‘You do not love me longer! You could not say those words if you loved me.’

‘Oh, George!’ she exclaimed, springing to her feet, and looking at me with indignant reproach; ‘could I say this if I did not love you more than I love myself?’

‘I was a fool to say that, and cruel as well,’ said I; ‘but I do think I am beside myself. Sit down again, Delia love; we will look at this coolly. We are both agitated. Your dear face shows that you still suffer from your swoon.’

‘No; I am none the worse for that. I was never sick in my life, and I shall bear up under greater misfortunes than a swoon. My body will live without Dr. Drench’s care, and my heart is too stout to break, let it ache how it may. No, I will not sit down. I have found a little courage, and must make the most of it to say—good-bye.’

‘I will not say farewell,’ cried I ;
‘ ’tis nonsense ! What does it matter
what opinion the world has of your
father?’

‘It may not matter to you. I believe
you love me so well that you would still be
gentle and kind to your wife, though every-
one cried shame upon her. But it matters
everything to me, and I will be an old maid
till the end of my life, if it cannot be said
“George Falkland did well to marry
Delia.”’

‘That shall be said, though every word
against your father is true. It shall be said
“Delia has saved George Falkland from
despair.”’

‘Oh! do not tempt me to do wrong,
George. Think that my life is not to end
to-night, or in a month or in a year, but
must be lived out for forty, maybe, fifty
long years ; and help me to do well, that

my regrets may be tempered with the knowledge that I did right by the man who loved me.'

'Think of our hopes—of the plans we made in that shed as we worked——'

'I have thought of them,' she cried, the tears springing in her eyes. ''Tis worse than saying good-bye to think of them,' and she stopped short, and burst into tears, that trickled through her fingers as she held them to her eyes.

I cannot now think of my conduct without bitterly reproaching myself for the selfishness of it.

'Be generous!' I cried (how inconsistently may now appear). 'Set aside a strained scruple for my sake.'

She forced her tears to stop, and turning to me, her dear eyes blinded with weeping, she said in a voice yet choked with emotion :

‘It is not you alone of whom I think. If my father is a thief, and despised by all the world, I must stay by him and give him comfort. Good-bye.’

She held out her hand.

I know not what madness possessed me, but I would not take her hand, and turned away, impatiently crying that I should not say farewell.

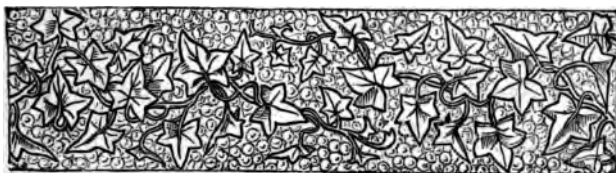
The closing of the door brought me to my senses. I turned about, and found her gone. I called her name, and ran to the door, repenting of my passionate cruelty. The hasp caught ; I turned and wrenched the handle this way and that way for a couple of minutes, without moving it. At length I got the door open and stepped forward.

Davie stood in the way.

‘Is it all settled?’ he said, with cheerful eagerness. ‘When’s it to be?’

‘Never!’ I cried, with a stamp of my foot, and looking at him with hatred for the first time, in my transport of disappointment and anger.





CHAPTER VII.

DAVIE RECEIVES A CHALLENGE.

‘**H**EAVENS alive, Mr. Falkland, sir! what’s to do?’ asked Davie, astonished—as well he might be—at my frenzy. ‘Pray tell me what you mean. Let us sit down and have it out, sir.’ He closed the door, and led me to a chair as though I were a sick man. ‘Come, sir, tell me what has happened. Surely Delia has not angered you thus. You do not mean to say that she is inconstant, hey, sir? That I cannot believe, for ’tis not in her nature to play fast and loose.’

It took no longer than the saying of these words for me to perceive how irrational, how selfish, and how cruel my conduct was ; and as I recalled to mind with what courage, devotion, and tenderness Delia had comported herself under conditions more trying by far than mine, I owned to myself with shame that I, a man, had less strength than she, a maid.

I now wished with all my heart that I had held my tongue, instead of blurting out the first word my passion prompted ; for how could I explain my word to Davie without telling him the cause, and how could I do that without adding to his sorrows and the unhappiness of dear Delia ? 'Twould be to him the cruellest blow of all to know that she had refused to marry me because of his fault.

'Come, sir,' said he, after waiting a few moments for me to speak, 'there must be a

meaning in your word: tell it me, I pray you.'

'I have been reflecting on the suggestion I made,' said I, hammering out my words with difficulty; 'and—and I see that I was over-hasty, and that—that the thing is impracticable.'

'Oh, indeed,' said he coldly, and with a suspicious glance.

'Yes; and I feel sure that it would be better to carry out our earlier intention, and postpone all thoughts of marriage until I have secured an independent position. You see, I should absolutely have to borrow money of you to buy a license, which would be contrary to all my principles.'

'So, so!'

He nodded his head, looking at me askant with raised eyebrows.

'My arm has so recovered its strength that I think I may fairly hope to do good

work with it—alone. So there is no reason why you should not take Delia away for a change of air, with the hope that when you return we—we may be able to fix a date for the marriage.'

Then followed an awkward silence. I felt how absurd my excuse was, yet my invention failed to supply me with a better. After looking at the floor in sombre study for some time, Davie spoke.

'You said "Never," Mr. Falkland,' said he.

'I was beside myself with agitation.'

There was another awkward pause, in which he looked up from the floor to my face, and then down to the floor again.

'I saw Delia leave the room,' he said quietly. 'Does she know this?'

I nodded assent.

'And she agrees with you?'

I nodded again.



‘And she is willing to give up the plan of working with you, and go away with me?’

‘Yes.’

Again Davie was silent for a space, then after drawing a deep breath he said :

‘I should think you were deceiving me, sir, if I did not believe that you are my friend. May be I am wrong, Mr. Falkland, to believe that : tell me, sir, if I may still call you my friend?’

I held out my hand to him. He took it and wrung it, and still holding it, said :

‘Now, sitting hand to hand, and speaking as one man should speak to another, tell me the truth. Have you refused to marry Delia because she is my daughter?’

‘No,’ said I.


‘A little more, sir,’ said he, still grasping my hand, and looking me full in the face with his mild earnest eyes—‘a little

more. I'm getting toughened like by hard usage, and whether I have one cut more or less, or whether the smart is little or much, matters not in the long run. Come, sir, tell me fairly—was it not Delia who refused to marry you ?'

What could I answer but 'Yes' ? 'Twas useless, and it was impossible, to tell a downright lie.

He gave my hand a little shake, looking at me with the tears flooding his eyes, and then let it fall, and turned his face away.

'I might have known it,' he said, as if in soliloquy. 'One may see what she will do beforehand, by just thinking the matter over, and settling what's the noblest and best thing that could be done,' and then, facing about, he asked, with the utmost tenderness in his voice : 'Is she not beautiful in every way, sir ?'



I responded warmly, and he continued :

‘I did her injustice. I thought as you didn’t go with the rest, and were willing to marry her, she would agree to marry you, seeing how wonderful obedient she is to your wishes, and how she sets your judgment up over the Ten Commandments like : but I mistook her. She won’t marry you while she thinks she’s the daughter of a thief.’ He rasped his long jaw with his knuckles reflectively, clearly turning over in his mind some knotty problem ; then he said : ‘I suppose if I proved to her and to you that I am not a thief, this marriage could be brought about—hey, sir ?’

‘That is not enough. She will not leave you while your honesty is doubted by a single person. I am not the only one she loves.’

‘Do you believe that, sir ?’ he asked eagerly.

‘I am sure of it.’

‘Ah ! that is what made you so furious like, when you found me barring your way in the door there ?’ He smiled at the idea of my jealousy.

‘Possibly. It makes me now impatient to think that all this unhappiness should be prolonged, if you have the means of ending it in your possession. It is your duty to clear your character.’

‘You doubt my honesty if you think I am not doing my duty,’ said Davie, with some asperity.

‘Your judgment may be in fault. You are protecting Lady Kestral at the expense of your daughter.’

‘You do not like Lady Kestral?’

‘No. I think she has forfeited all claim to consideration. Her conduct at the present time, when she could by a word remove suspicion from you, who have been her best

friend, proves that she is utterly heartless and worthless.'

'And you think I should be justified in publishing her shame to the world, sir?'

'Yes.'

'You think so because you dislike that unhappy woman, maybe. But tell me, sir, if you would think so if she were something nearer to you than an aunt. Supposing now she were your mother, would you counsel me to proclaim the wantonness of her youth?'

This extraordinary question silenced me. It seemed to me beside the mark. While I was yet considering it, Davie rose and took a turn or two across the room. Suddenly he stopped, and said, with a deep sigh :

'I see nothing for it, Mr. Falkland, but to wait. I will take Delia away, and we must hope for some lucky accident to

change our fortunes. Help sometimes comes from the most unlikely quarters.'

These words were scarcely spoken, when the door opened, and a servant, bringing Davie a couple of cards, said that the gentlemen were in waiting.

'Squire Humphrey and Mr. Shotter,' said Davie showing me the cards; 'they came yesterday, just after Delia's swoon, and I sent word that I shouldn't be at home till this afternoon—and here they are. Who knows but that they have come to apologize for leaving my table t'other day, and that we may once more get friends about us, and jog on in the old way? Show the gentlemen in, Bates. I warrant,' he added hopefully, as the servant went out, 'that here's the very turn of fortune we are looking for.'

'I hope you may be right,' said I ruefully. 'Do you wish me to stay?'

'By all means. A piece of good luck is

like a bottle—it loses half its flavour taken in solitude.’

The servant ushered in the two visitors, who, having made a very formal bow to us, took the chairs placed for them, and glancing at the servant, waited in silence for his withdrawal.

‘Glad to see you, gentlemen. You can go, Bates. Fine weather for your hops, Mr. Humphrey.’

Squire Humphrey bowed stiffly once more, and the servant being gone, said, after clearing his throat :

‘Mr. Adams, hem !—we are come on behalf of, hem !—Lord Kestral. We are his lordship’s friends, you understand.’

‘I am sorry to hear it, sir. I’d rather you were mine.’

‘In the first place,’ resumed the Squire, ‘we wish to know if it is true that after beating Mr. Randolph Bond, you bade him

tell Lord Kestral that you would serve him in the same fashion if he were ten years younger.'

'Yes, gentlemen. Mr. Bond has told the truth for once in his life. I did say that.'

'In that case his lordship demands that you—hem !—retract your words and make apology for the insult offered him.'

'I see nothing to retract,' said Davie calmly ; 'I meant what I said, and what I meant then I mean now. The old man deserves the whipping I gave his step-son, for he has encouraged the young pup in his ill behaviour, who, but for him, would in all likelihood never have annoyed me. 'Tis Lord Kestral who owes me an apology, and you may tell him that for his comfort.'

'Then we may understand that you refuse to apologize?'

‘That you may most certainly.’

‘But one course remains, Mr. Adams : you must give his lordship satisfaction, which, despite your disparity in rank, he is willing to accept.’

‘I don’t understand you, sir ; if ’tis any satisfaction to Lord Kestral to find he has got off cheap, he is welcome to it. I don’t know what you think of it, sir ; but it looks to me as if you had been sent on a fool’s errand.’

‘To be very plain with you,’ said Squire Humphrey, bridling up at this insinuation, ‘his lordship proposes to fight you.’

‘Fight me!’ exclaimed Davie, with a ludicrous expression of amusement and incredulity in his face. ‘Fight me!’ he repeated, bursting into laughter. ‘Why, I could floor the old man with my open hand. Fight, at my time of life, and with a man who’s nought but lath and plaster, so to

—
speak—not I! Why, Mr. Humphrey, sir, I'm surprised at you calling yourself his friend, and backing him up in such nonsense. I gave you credit for more solid sense, sir, for you seemed the other day to talk reasonably enough about hops and horses, and that sort of thing.'

'Then you refuse to apologize, and you refuse to fight?' cried Squire Humphrey, jumping up in choler.

'I do,' said Davie, rising. 'Does that surprise you, Mr. Humphrey?'

'Not at all. Your refusal merely confirms the bad opinion I had of your character.'

'What do you mean by that?' cried Davie angrily.

'What do I mean, sir? I mean what I said to his lordship this morning, that a man who will tamely bear the imputation of dishonesty is not likely to risk his

life to save himself from the stigma of cowardice.'

With this, he clapped on his hat fiercely, and was about to leave the room with his friend, when Davie, who had stood for a moment or two stupefied by this speech, overtook him, and said :

' I must beg your pardon, Mr. Humphrey, for I believe I have mistaken you greatly. Will you have the goodness to tell me how Lord Kestral wishes to fight me ?'

' That is a matter to be arranged between your seconds and us. You would have the choice of weapons.'

' Come back, sir, I pray you. I've been making the stupidest blunder in the world, but one that's natural enough for one of my ways and habits. I'm country bred and born, like yourself, and you know how countrymen settle their disputes. 'Tis only within this last year that I've been mixing

with the London gentry, and as you see, I han't yet picked up all their niceties. This is a duel you've come to arrange, sir ?'

'It is.'

'Well, to be sure! I thought it was only young bucks who fought 'em, and not men of our age—still less such old fellows as Lord Kestral. Well, well; live and learn. I give you my word,' he added, with a laugh, 'I thought he wanted to box me ; which would be ridiculous indeed, seeing he could have no chance of winning. But we're to use weapons, hey ?'

'Sword or pistol—whichever you prefer.'

'Oh, it's all the same to me—I'm as good at one as t'other,' he laughed. 'Have the kindness, sir, to tell the old man I'll meet him when and where he likes.'

'You have our cards—you will send your friends to us.'

‘Yes; I dare say I can still find one or two to serve me in this affair.’

‘On the other hand, if you prefer to make an apology——’

‘Sir,’ said Davie, interrupting him, ‘if my words were victuals and drink, I’d die of starvation rather than eat ’em. I have never shot a sparrow, nor taken the life wantonly of the meanest thing that crawls, but I’ll do my best to kill Lord Kestral. He has received nought but kindness at my hands, but he has done his utmost to ruin me, and to dishonour me before my friends and in the sight of my daughter. I accept gladly this honourable means of punishing him, and may God forgive me if I punish him beyond his deserts.’



CHAPTER VIII.

FALKLAND'S ACTIVITY IN EQUIPPING DAVIE FOR THE FIGHT.

IHAD said not a word during this interview, and after the two country gentlemen were gone I could find nothing to say to Davie ; who, as deep in thought as I, sat a little removed from me, seeming not to know that I was by.

I dreaded the result of this meeting, yet I could see no way of averting it. Davie had closed all ways of retreat, and I knew his character too well to believe that even

if an outlet were found he would avail himself of it. Davie had the advantage of years, but this was outbalanced by Lord Kestral's skill. Success either with pistol or rapier did not depend upon strength. If my uncle had only enough force to hold a weapon for five seconds, Davie would fall—and then what would become of Delia? Would she ever forgive me for permitting him to fight? These reflections were at length interrupted by Davie.

‘Of course, Mr. Falkland,’ said he, ‘this must not get to Delia’s ears. For her sake you must help me to keep it secret.’

‘She’ll hear of it soon enough, anyway,’ said I gloomily.

‘I look to you to give me courage, not to take it away,’ he said reproachfully. ‘I think I could dance like the Indian savages at the prospect of this fight, if it wasn’t for thinking of Delia. Come, sir, tell me you’ll

stand by her if the worst happens that may—cheer me a little.’

‘ You know I shall stand by her, Davie.’

‘ Aye, that’s right. But I would to heaven you were man and wife now,’ and he added, with a touch of regret, ‘ I did hope to see you married, sir.’

‘ So you will,’ said I, shaking off my spleen.

‘ Do you think so, sir ? well, so do I. I’ve a mighty belief in Providence. In these battles we’ve had with the French, we’ve always got the best of it, which shows that God helps the right. In all the fights I’ve ever read on we’ve come out well, which is natural, if Providence ain’t blind to the badness of foreigners in general. Not but what your uncle, according to his own showing, is vastly handy at this sort of game. I’ve heard him chatter by the hour together about pinking Lord This and tucking-up Sir That.’

‘Do you know anything about duelling?’

‘God bless your heart, sir, not I! I’ve never handled a sword in my life, and I was always mortal afeard of fire-arms. I’d beat anyone with a scythe, and I was reckoned one of the best players at ninepins in Ches-hunt, but that’s about as near as I’ve gone to any practice with swords and bullets. But I suppose I can learn?’

‘There’s not much time.’

‘When do you count this little business is to be settled, sir?’

‘Your seconds must see Lord Kestral’s to-morrow, and possibly they will fix the meeting for the next morning.’

‘Short and sharp, hey—well, so much the better : the sooner ’tis over, the easier I shall be, in all events. By the way, sir, what am I to do about seconds?—I can’t ask you, as ’tis your uncle I’m to fight ; and hang me

if I have another friend in the world now, thanks to my good fortune.'


'I think you may count upon Mr. Rogers for one, and Drench for the other.'

'Mr. Rogers hasn't come back from his friends at Sevenoaks. It looks as if he didn't care to be in the house with me, don't it, sir?'

'Not at all. He told me before going that he should stay at Sevenoaks if he were asked, with the hope that in a few days we should get over our difficulties. He saw that his presence here was awkward for us. You may rely upon his support. I'll go to Sevenoaks this evening, and fetch him.'

'I'm sure I am much obliged to you, Mr. Falkland. I suppose, sir,' he added, after a moment's reflection, 'you don't know e'er a cut-throat who could put me up to a few wrinkles in this business?'

'What weapon shall you use?'



‘ Oh, I must go at him with a sword, sir, for I should have no chance with a pistol. I can’t see a boy scaring of crows, but I must shut my eyes when he’s about to fire.’

I bethought me of a French refugee, one Monsieur Perrotin, who had sat to Mr. Rogers as a model—being wonderfully well formed in the arm—and amused us vastly in the time allotted for rest by his feats of dexterity with the small sword, no less than by his endless histories of the duels successfully fought by gentlemen whom he had instructed in the art. I promised Davie I would try to get this man ; and having taken some refreshment, I took leave of him, and drove in a gig to Sevenoaks, where, without much difficulty, I succeeded in finding Mr. Rogers. I told him the object of my visit, and gave him a pretty accurate description of the interview between the two country gentlemen and Davie.

‘Well,’ said he, when he had heard me out ; ‘I’ll believe no ill of a man who has the spirit to fight under such disadvantages, and I will stand by him willingly.’

We went together to Drench, whom I found far less ready to accept the office of second.

‘A pretty job this is for me, truly,’ said he, giving a kick at the cat, who was curled up asleep on the hassock under the table. ‘Stole a pair of kidneys last night, did you? Left me nothing for breakfast but a scurvy round of toast—hey?’ and with that he caught up a napkin from the table, which was laid for supper, and giving a flick at the cat, whipped a drinking-glass off the table and sent it spinning against the brass fender, on which it smashed in a thousand pieces. ‘Curse the cat!’ he cried. ‘You might have hit on a better person than me for this affair, I should think, Falkland. It’s ten

to one if I shall match that glass in Seven-oaks. If I beg off, Adams will take offence—and if I accept, Humphrey will have nothing more to do with me. This may be the ruin of my practice. Good as eighteen-pence out of my pocket,’ he grumbled, picking up the fragments of the broken glass. ‘You know your aunt’s ill a-bed, Falkland. A confounded cat! Hanged if I know precisely what’s the matter with her ladyship, but ’tis something serious, or I’m a Dutchman. A pair of kidneys and a tumbler-glass! that’s good enough for twenty-four hours, I fancy! She and your uncle are staying with the Squire—sent for me this afternoon. I made light of it, as you may suppose, not to frighten her out of the house or alarm the family—but there is every symptom of fever. The whole family’ll catch it,’ he pursued cheerfully, rubbing his hands, and for the moment seeming

to forget all about the duel, and the cat, and the tumbler ; ' for there's no keeping the women out of her room ; they all want to learn how to be sick like a lady of title.'

' Well, Drench,' said I, ' you must wait upon Mr. Humphrey to-morrow morning with Mr. Rogers.'

' Yes, with a bolus in one hand and a sword in the other : a pretty picture of a respectable family doctor ! I shall cut my fingers with these cursed splinters presently. Did Adams send you to me with this invitation ?'

' Yes, and you can't refuse it. I undertake that you shall not be out of pocket by your friendship.'


' Thank you, Falkland, that's kind. I should like to know what act of mine justifies the insinuation that my reluctance proceeds from mercenary considerations ? You

know well enough that if Adams hadn't a penny in the world I'd be his second. Humphrey can get another doctor if he likes; 'tain't that, 'tis this cursed concatenation of aggravating trifles which upsets my bile!' and with these words he flung the fragments of the broken tumbler under the grate.

My friends accompanied me to the Coach and Horses, where I had bespoke a post-chaise on my way to Drench's house—for, by good luck, Mr. Rogers had Monsieur Perrotin's address in his pocket-book, and he agreed with me that no better man could be found to instruct Davie—and there I bade them good-bye, and presently was spinning along the London Road to seek the agile Frenchman.

'Twas past midnight when I arrived in Soho, and found the house in which Monsieur Perrotin lived. 'Twas a French

lodging-house; there was not a light in any of the windows, but the door stood wide open, for, as I found, some of the lodgers were dancers at the opera, and the last had not yet come in. I knocked at the first door I came to, and asked for Monsieur Perrotin, and a woman's voice told me I should find him at the top of the house. Thither I groped my way up the dark and narrow staircase, and after waking up a couple of families in my search, and being heartily cursed for my mistake, I succeeded in finding my man and arousing him from his sleep. I told him my name, and said I must speak with him at once on a matter of importance; after a few minutes' consideration, he dropped out of bed and began to grope about for his tinder-box, and at the end of ten minutes spent in getting a light and execrating everything but me, for whom his curses were most intended, he opened



the door and asked me what my business was, with as little complacency as needs be. No sooner, however, had he learnt the purpose for which he was wanted, than his whole manner changed, and he proceeded to dress himself with the utmost alacrity, questioning me the while in the most courteous terms of his courteous language, as to the relative merits of the principals to be engaged, their age, their bodily proportions and address, their experience in fighting, and, in short, drawing from me so many minute particulars, that I verily believe he knew as much about Davie and Lord Kestral by the time he had got into his breeches, as the reader may have learnt through reading all the pages I have writ on the subject.

When he at length finished setting his wig and was completely dressed—and as handsomely, too, as any Bond Street beau, for

his clothes were the gift of a gentleman of quality whom he had helped to a victory, and were worn only on *fête* days and such important occasions as the present—he fetched out from beneath the dirty bed a handsome mahogany-wood case containing a pair of duelling swords, and a bag of green baize containing masks, pads and gauntlets ; these, together with half a dozen foils, we presently carried downstairs and put in the chaise. He returned to the house to kiss his father and mother, who lived on the first floor, and then he took his seat beside me ; I gave the word to the post-boy, and we started off. About five o'clock we reached the Coach and Horses at Sevenoaks, and thence we drove in the gig which I had left there the preceding evening to Maplehurst, where we arrived shortly after eight.

To avoid Delia's observation, I bade the driver take us round to the stables by the

back way, and there I left Monsieur Perrotin, and went to find Davie. A servant told me that he was taking breakfast with his daughter and Miss Dobson in the long-room, and I was sorely tempted to go in and join the little party, for my heart went out towards Delia. I longed to see again her dear face and hear her musical voice, and to prove to her by my reserve that I regretted my hasty anger, and wished to atone for it and respect her feelings above all things. But perceiving on reflection that my presence must embarrass her, and that my contrition and reserve could only increase her own sufferings by sympathy with me, I resolved to deny myself this gratification ; and so, laying hold of the fellow's arm as he was about to open the door, I bade him say nothing concerning my presence, and betook myself to the library, where I sat down, leaving the door a

little ajar, that I might catch a glimpse of my darling as she came from breakfast, and so I waited, my heart beating quickly with love and expectation.

I felt highly satisfied with myself for having taken this course, especially when I came to consider how my intrusion would have acted upon Davie's spirits, spoiling his happiness in Delia's society, and embittering this morning meal, which might possibly be the last he was to take with her. I had not waited long, when they came out, he and she, hand-in-hand. She was pale, but looking far less unhappy than when we met, and this should have caused me to rejoice. Yet—so unreasonable and selfish did love make me—I own I felt a pang of disappointment to find that she did not share the sick sorrow of my heart in our separation. She disappeared from my narrow range of vision ; but I could hear her talking at the

terrace door with Davie, who was speculating upon the hour of my return. Then I heard the exchange of kisses, and she came across the hall and looked into the room she had left. Miss Dobson had gone upstairs, and the room was empty. She looked about, as if to see if any servant was near, and then she went up to the pedestal on which was placed the clay model we had made together, and stood before it, looking at it in still silence for some minutes. She moved a little, and I saw her eyes were resting on the base, where at my bidding she had put her signature ; and then she put her arms gently about the clay, and bending down, kissed the name of Falkland. With a little moan she raised her head and walked away, and I lost sight of her again until she crossed the landing on the great stairs with slow and weary steps.



CHAPTER IX.

AN ATTEMPT TO SAVE DAVIE THROUGH THE
INTERVENTION OF LADY KESTRAL.

H SLIPPED out of the house and overtook Davie in the drive where he was walking with his hands behind him and his eyes on the ground. He was grave, but by no means melancholy, and he greeted me with a genial, kindly smile, and warmly pressed my hand.

I told him I had brought the fencing-master, and he thanked me heartily for the trouble I had taken, as we turned into the

path by the back of the house and stepped out briskly towards the stables.

‘I can’t help thinking,’ said he cheerfully, ‘that all will go well, for the fight is not of our seeking ; we have right on our side, and surely Providence, which is merciful in all things, will not be unmerciful in this.’

I assured him that I was of his opinion ; and, indeed, the confident assurance of Monsieur Perrotin had encouraged me to hope for Davie’s success ; but this did not alter the intention I had formed on my journey to London, which was to make another appeal to my aunt’s sense of duty or self-interest.

I introduced Davie to Monsieur Perrotin, who saluted him with a prodigious fine bow. We went into the house and took some breakfast, and then proceeded to the out-house which had been prepared as a study for

Delia and me, where it was settled Davie =
should receive his instructions from the =
fencing-master. With much delight the =
Frenchman set his foils in order, and -
opening the mahogany case, displayed the =
pair of swords, which he graciously placed
at the disposal of Davie, who, taking one in
his hand, made a cut or two to the right
and left, and then, passing his thumb along
the edge, seemed hugely surprised at the==
idea of anyone being killed by such a slight==
instrument.

‘I could do more mischief with a crabstick in five minutes,’ said he, ‘than you—r
uncle could do with one of these things ==if
he thrashed me till nightfall.’

But he very quickly changed his opinion when Monsieur Perrotin explained the proper use of the weapon, and putting a foil in his hand, demonstrated how easily he might be run through the body by a skilful hand,

and how impossible it was to defend himself against the point in his present ignorance.

‘If we’re to fight with spits,’ said he, ‘I’m likely to be trussed up as neatly as e’er a pullet that was ever put down to roast.’

But Monsieur Perrotin was not discouraged by these signs, and vowed he would in the course of a single day make him a match for any English antagonist, if he would only obey his instructions.

‘Then let us begin at once, for God’s sake,’ said David, ‘for the day is getting on.’

I had given out to the servants that was about to commence modelling, and not wish to be disturbed, and I knew that this intimation coming to Delia’s ears would keep her away from the outhouse ;

so when Davie and Monsieur Perrotin had settled down to their business I left them, and taking a turn through the shrubbery, struck into the little wood, and reached the lane without being seen by anyone of the house. I soon reached the village, and having learnt which road to take, I set off at a brisk pace for Squire Humphrey's, where I arrived at the end of half an hour.

Accident and fashion facilitated my seeing Lady Kestral, for Squire Humphrey and Lord Kestral were gone for a drive, and Mrs. Humphrey and her daughters were yet a-bed ; the servant, a buxom Kentish wench, explaining with a grin, that since her ladyship lay in the house, neither the mistress nor the younger ladies ever thought of rising before eleven. I bade the girl tell my aunt that I wished to speak with her on a matter of importance, and she presently

brought me word that Lady Kestral would see me in her bed-chamber, a piece of London politeness which seemed to greatly scandalize the honest lass.

My aunt was clearly unwell ; her face was flushed and her eyes were heavy. Yet was that vanity, which had taken the place of all better feelings, so paramount in her nature, that, though heavy with sickness, her first thought was to appear pleasing to the eye. She had a powder-pot in one hand and a hand-mirror in the other ; and, dropping these as I entered, she rested her elbow on the pillow, and fell into an attitude which may have been graceful, but was not, I am certain, comfortable.

‘Don’t look at me, George ; don’t look at me,’ she cried. ‘I must be horrid, I am sure. I am frightened at my own complexion. If I had lived here all my life, I couldn’t be more vulgarly red. The

air is killing me ; 'tis far too strong for me.
Don't you think I am a fright ?'

' You look unwell,' I said.

' Unwell ! what a word. You should be
a Quaker, George, for I protest you have as
little gallantry and as much bluntness as any
one of the sect. I shouldn't be surprised
to hear from your lips that I look older
and plainer than when you saw me last.'

' I have no such matter to talk about,'
said I impatiently. ' You know what
happened yesterday ?'

' Yesterday—yesterday, let me see. Oh,
yes ! some one brought me a book of fashion
for last March to amuse me, and I protested
she succeeded to a marvel. Poor country
soul ! she didn't know how we were
dying to laugh at her.'

' I see you have not heard that your
husband has sent a challenge to Davie.'

' My lord sent a challenge to Hon^{est}

Davie !' she exclaimed in astonishment, rather than alarm. 'What can be his object?'

'That you should know better than I.'

'I know nothing. 'Tis the first I have heard of this affair.' She leant back upon her pillow, and shielding her eyes from the light with her hand, lay for some moments silent ; then, raising herself, she said petulantly, 'Give me a little toast-and-water from the table ; my head aches. I cannot think collectedly, and I want to understand this.'

I gave her a cup of the beverage, which she drank with avidity. Then, knitting her brow and shutting her eyes, she asked with impatience what we had been talking about.

'Ah, yes, I recollect,' she said, when I mentioned Davie's name. 'My husband has sent him a challenge, and I want to know why. You must help me, George, my

head is ~~firm~~. Why has Lord Kestral challenged Davie?

‘The reason he gives is that Davie insulted him.’

‘It is not that.’ Lady Kestral shook her head, still holding her hand over her eyes.

‘His rank would absolve him from the necessity of avenging an insult offered by a person of such doubtful character as Davie ; and my lord is not a man to risk his life carelessly.’

‘Perhaps he thinks he has nothing to risk by the challenge.’

‘Ah!’

‘He has been led to believe that Davie is a thief ; he may very reasonably conclude that he is therefore a coward. He may expect to frighten Davie into an apology, and so to obtain the whip-hand of him. If Davie apologized for resenting an insult to himself, he would tacitly acknowledge you

son's right to insult him—and must pay to be exempted.'

'I understand that. Your conclusion is likely enough to be the right one.' She dropped her hand and glanced towards the door; then in a low voice she said: 'But Davie is not a thief.'

'No, nor a coward either. He has accepted the challenge; his seconds will meet Lord Kestral's this morning, and the duel will take place, unless you interpose.'

'I! What can I do?'

'Tell your husband the truth; when he sees that he has nothing to gain, and that Davie is prepared to meet him, he will have the discretion to retire.'

'I remember you said something to this effect when we were last alone.'

'Yes; but there is a stronger motive now to do your duty. The life of your most faithful friend is in danger, and the happiness

and welfare of his daughter also, and they shall not suffer by your selfishness. If you do not tell Lord Kestral all that you have told me, I will.'

'Notwithstanding that the facts were given you in confidence, and that it would be to your dishonour to betray me.'

'Notwithstanding that.'

'Don't shout, George.'

I was not conscious of having raised my voice, though it is likely enough I had, for I was losing patience.

'I can scarcely hold my head up, 'tis splitting. Throw the window open. I want to be cool, and to see what I ought to do.'

When I went back to the bedside after opening the window, Lady Kestral's eyes were closed, and her quick heavy breathing showed that she had fallen into a doze. I waited a minute or so, and she gave a rest-

less turn and opened her eyes in a bewildered manner.

‘Yes, yes,’ she said, raising herself on her elbow with an irritable expression. ‘I know—my husband and Davie. We were talking about them.’

‘You said you wished to do what you should do,’ said I, ‘and if you have any sense of gratitude you will keep your word. Consider what this man has done for you—how he alone befriended you in your distress; how patiently he has stood your friend, even when he found that you had ceased to be his. Only two days ago I heard him promise to make a certain allowance that you might sustain a proper position in society.’

‘You heard him promise that—to whom?’

‘To your husband.’

‘That shows that he still admires me!’ she said, with a momentary gleam of complacency.

‘It shows that he still pities you.’

‘Whether ’tis pity or admiration he feels for me, I have no doubt he would make me his wife if I were a widow. Why do you wish to prevent this meeting? You are not more fond of your uncle than I am of my husband, and ’twould be to the advantage of us all if he were out of the way. Upon my life, I think you’d play the part of Marplot to perfection.’

‘Will you tell your husband why Davie conceals the will, or shall I?’ I asked, rising.

‘You can tell him, if it pleases you: it will only give me the trouble to deny every word of your story; it will be to his lordship’s interest to believe me. Don’t be a fool, George, if you can help it.’ She closed her lips tightly with a little moan of pain; and for a moment lay silent, clasping her hands upon her forehead. Then she proceeded in irritable tones, ‘Show

me that it is to my advantage to confess everything, and you are more likely to persuade me than if you performed your worst threats!

‘If you consult only your own interest,’ said I, ‘you will prevent the duel. Davie must fall——’


‘Why must he fall?’ she asked, interrupting me. ‘Davie is a strong, healthy man, yet in the prime of life; Lord Kestral is past sixty, and feeble beyond his years.’

‘My uncle has skill; Davie—as you may suppose—has none in this polite art, and success depends entirely upon skill.’

‘Ah! I didn’t think of that. Go on——’

‘If he falls, your early and late ingratitude will be exposed as soon as his papers are opened.’

‘He will burn the paper that implicates me before he fights, if he expects to fall.’



‘He will do nothing of the kind. For, much as he respects your welfare, he cares more for that of his daughter. For her sake he will burn nothing that may clear his name from dishonour and establish her just right to his fortune.’

‘Her right to his fortune—her right to his fortune! Give me that shawl, and shut the window—I am freezing.’ Indeed, she was trembling violently, and spoke through her teeth, which she had closed to prevent their chattering. ‘Her right to his fortune,’ she reiterated as I came back from the window. ‘Then you think he will leave all he has to her?’

‘I am sure he will.’

‘Does he know that you have come to me?’

‘No ; but he will, when I return. I shall tell him my object in coming here, and if after that he finds that you have done

Nothing to prevent his fall, you may rely upon gaining nothing by it.'

'You mean he would cut me out of his will if I am in it?'

'He would be a fool indeed, if he left you a penny-piece after that.'

'On the other hand——?'

'You know his character well enough to be certain that, so far as his power extends, it would be strained to reward you.'

'Oh God, my head!' exclaimed Lady Kestral, bowing down and clasping her forehead with her hands. 'Yes, yes, I see it all clearly now,' she presently continued, speaking in that position. 'You have shown me where my interest lies. Thank you; now leave me. I am ill.'

'But,' said I, 'you have not told me your intention.'

'I shall tell my husband all.'

'Send for him and tell him in my pre-

sence,' I said, knowing that her word was not to be trusted.

'Ha!' she exclaimed, rocking from side to side with her head in her hands, 'maybe you would like the whole household to be present. You are simple enough to think that or any other absurdity. He'd say I was light-headed, and have reason for saying it. Don't you see that all men and women are not like you and your Delia, and that the majority, when they get over the feebleness of youth, are very much like Lord Kestral and me. We are not stage villains. Neither he nor I do wrong by choice, but from the sheer necessity of self-preservation. We are only too glad to do right if it does not call for self-sacrifice, and positively rejoice in it when 'tis to our advantage. You have shown me that it is to my interest to prevent this duel, and now I must show my husband that for his own sake, and not for mine, nor

yours, nor Davie's, nor any other living creature's, he must forego the satisfaction of killing Davie. That's not to be done before you. Consult *your* interest, and go. Great God !' she exclaimed passionately, throwing her head back upon the pillow in an agony of pain ; and then she drew the bed-clothes over her head to shut out the light, and I took up my hat and left her.





CHAPTER X.

FALKLAND APPEALS TO HIS UNCLE—DAVIE'S LESSON AND ITS RESULT.

I QUITTED the house as I had entered it, without seeing either Lord Kestral, Squire Humphrey, or any member of his family. I imagined my uncle was gone into a retired spot to practise with the Squire ; and as for the ladies, the canonical hour for rising had not yet struck. I went back to the hall by the same way I had taken in leaving it, and found Davie and Monsieur Perrotin close at work.

‘I’m getting on gently, Mr. Falkland,’

Davie said, when I asked what progress he made,—‘not too fast, you know, sir. We’ve scarcely had half an hour’s real fighting yet, for it has took me best part of the time to learn the first civilities of it. Thank the laws, I learnt dancing, otherwise this shuffling and scraping would be more than I could learn in a week. But as monseer says, the art of fighting is to find out your enemy’s weak p’int, and not let him discover yours; and all this is just to make the old man think that I’m as good at sticking as he is, don’t you see, sir? As a game,’ he continued, after a pause, ‘I think I should get to like duelling; but as a means of settling a quarrel it isn’t to compare with a good bout of drubbing with crab-sticks. There’s too much shilly-shallying about it, and one has to be as nimble as a pea in a frying-pan. At first I thought I was going to have it all my own way—thought I could stick

monseer first go. But, Lord ! there's no getting at him anyhow. Howsever, I know how to begin, and that's something. And now, monseer, we'll be getting on again, if you please.'

I looked on for a time. Davie did what he was told to do, and did it fairly, by dint of his strong will and ready obedience to his teacher. It seemed to me that he might in the course of the day learn a few of the movements, but that it was utterly impossible to acquire sufficient ability to defend himself for five minutes against an expert swordsman. I could not endure to watch these patient preparations for an encounter which must in all probability be fatal to my poor friend, and the cause of bitter woe to his loving daughter. I slipped out of the house, and with a heavy heart once more betook myself to the road leading to Squaire Humphrey's, and there awaited with feverish

impatience the appearance of Mr. Rogers and Drench, for my whole hope now centred on Lady Kestral's influence over my uncle.

About one o'clock I espied a hack coach coming along the road from the direction of Sevenoaks, and as it passed I perceived my two friends seated within. I would not retard them by stopping the coach, but running beside it, I spoke to them through the window.

'For God's sake,' I cried, 'come to an amicable arrangement with Kestral if possible, for Davie must fall to a certainty if they meet.'

'Does he send an apology?' asked Mr. Rogers.

'No ; but I believe Lord Kestral will be glad to compromise matters if he can.'

'We will do our best,' replied Drench, putting his hand upon mine as it rested on the frame of the window.

I gave his hand a shake in grateful acknowledgment, and fell back.

For a good hour I paced up and down the lane, keeping as near the entrance to Squire Humphrey's grounds as was politic, thrumming the papers in my pockets into shreds, and straining my ears for the sound of coach-wheels. At length the coach came out. I ran to meet it, holding up my hand. The driver pulled up, and I went breathless to the window.

'Well?' I asked.

'Come inside, Falkland,' said Mr. Rogers, seeing my excitement.

'No. What news have you?'

'Bad. We've done our utmost; and I believe Humphreys and Shotter have done theirs also. They've consulted with the old man, and he emphatically refuses to make any concession. Adams must make a full apology, decline to fight, or meet

Kestral to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. Come, Falkland, get in here with us. Don't give way, man.'

'Leave me here,' said I; 'I shall be better alone. The walk and the fresh air will do me good. Go on; I'll follow.'

They saw they could do nothing for me, and acted upon my advice. I was grateful to them for leaving me. The fatigue I had undergone, together with my emotions, had for the moment unmanned me, but going a little out of my way, I found a freshet, and having drunk heartily of the cold clear water, I felt much restored, and was enabled to put my thoughts into shape, and reason with myself as to what practical good I could now do. The result of these cogitations was that I rose presently from the shady bank on which I had been sitting and marched off towards Squire Humphrey's house for the second time that day.

The gatekeeper, who had previously made no objection to my going up to the house, now stopped me, and begged to know my business. I told him I wished to see my uncle, Lord Kestral.

‘Sir,’ says the fellow, pocketing the crown I had put into his hand ; ‘I have orders not to let you pass, and ’tis more than my place is worth to disobey; but if so be that you can manage your affair with a pen and ink, you can step into my lodge, write what you please, and I’ll have your letter carried up to the house.’

I went into the lodge parlour and wrote these words :

‘MY LORD,

‘I beg you to give me a brief interview: I have a statement to make which is of vital importance.

‘Your nephew and servant,

‘GEORGE FALKLAND.’

This letter the gatekeeper's wife took to the house, and she presently returned with a reply as follows :

‘ SIR,

‘ I shall be glad to receive you and listen to your statement to-morrow at this hour.

‘ KESTRAL.’

I snatched a fresh sheet of paper, and wrote again :

‘ MY LORD,

‘ I conclude, from your perseverance in demanding satisfaction of Mr. Adams, that Lady Kestral has not made the confession to you which she promised me this morning she would make, and I therefore feel myself justified in stating a fact to you which I hope will induce you to withdraw your challenge. The deed by which Mr.

Adams is entitled to the property of the late Mr. Bond contains a statement of Lady Kestral's incontinence. This fact I received from Lady Kestral's lips. To shield her from public disgrace and your resentment, Mr. Adams refused to produce this paper. You will see, my lord, the injustice of punishing him for his too merciful consideration of her welfare, and be persuaded, I trust, in the interest of all concerned, to revoke your late decision. Should Mr. Adams fall, Lady Kestral's dishonour can no longer be kept secret, and his legate will be qualified to claim restitution of the property held by your step-son through the suppression of his father's will. I shall be most happy to promote with your lordship any amicable settlement of the difficulty, and I now await your commands.

‘G. F.’

To this hastily written appeal, I received a brief answer as follows :

SIR,

‘It is impossible for me to believe any statement to the discredit of Lady Kestral, and I beg you to give yourself no further trouble on my account.

‘KESTRAL.’

‘P.S.—The bearer is instructed to bring no other message from you to me.’

I turned my back upon the gatekeeper and left him without a word. I could hope for nothing from Lord Kestral. Obviously he disbelieved the statement, or he would have taken longer to consider his reply. I do not think he doubted the truth of my assertion, but his wife's. She was so subtly cunning, that he would not believe even the confession that turned seemingly to her disadvantage. He suspected her every action

of being a cloak to some deep design against himself. Oddly enough, though I knew her perfidious nature, it never occurred to me that I myself was being deceived ; and this notwithstanding Davie's reticence, which had once or twice suggested to my mind that there was more in the will than I knew of or thought I knew of.

Mr. Rogers and Drench were looking at the horses in the stable when I got back to the Hall. I told them I had made an attempt to move my uncle, and failed.

'Well,' said Drench, ''tis a bad job for me.'

I was about to retort angrily, when Mr. Rogers said :

'We expected you would try to bring about an accommodation, and so awaited your return before letting Adams know the result of our visit ; but there is no longer any reason for delay.'

‘Especially as we have eaten nothing since nine this morning,’ said Drench, ‘and that hasn’t digested properly,’ he added, thumping his chest.


The clock was then striking four ; as we walked towards the building where the sword practice had been going on, the door opened, and Davie, followed by Monsieur Perrotin, came out.

‘Look you, Falkland,’ said Drench, ‘you must put a cheerful face on the matter, for the poor devil won’t need any trouble but his own to discourage him.’

Davie seemed in good spirits ; he shook hands with Mr. Rogers and Drench, and taking my arm affectionately, turned to them and said :

‘Well, gentlemen, when’s it to be ?’

‘Seven o’clock to-morrow morning, in the paddock behind Squire Humphrey’s garden.’



‘Very good ; we shall not over-sleep our-
selves, I warrant. Lord Kestral did no-
wish to make it up, I suppose, sir?’

‘No ; he will listen to no adjustment of
your differences short of an absolute
apology.’

‘Then he must take the consequences of
his obstinacy, for I have no apology to give.
I fancy,’ said he, addressing me, ‘I shall
make short work of it. I’ve got into the
knack of it. Monseer is quite satisfied with
me—aren’t you, sir?’

‘Perfectly well. Monsieur vill done
milor’s business, and make himself famous
for evair, in a leetle five minuits.’

Perrotin spoke in a tone of perfect assur-
ance which astonished me far more than it
did either Mr. Rogers or Drench.

‘Bravo!’ cried the latter, ‘I’m heartily
glad to hear it.’ He cast a side glance at
Mr. Rogers, which I was not at a loss to

Understand, for I felt tolerably certain that he, at least, had in his heart very little faith in Davie's honesty, and this announcement may only have confirmed his existing suspicion that Davie's ignorance of fencing was a pretence.

'I shall have great pleasure in showing you how 'tis done, sir, presently; but now let us go in, gentlemen, for I ordered dinner to be dished by four.'

Delia sent an excuse and kept her room.

As soon as we had eaten, we repaired to the outhouse, Davie being very anxious that we should judge of his skill, when Monsieur Perrotin proposed that we should take it in turn to represent Lord Kestral, and put Davie's ability to the test. I, having no skill whatever, declined, but Mr. Rogers accepted the invitation, and Drench promised to take his turn after. Monsieur Perrotin adjusted the masks, and having

chalked the buttons of the foils, gave the signal to begin.

Davie saluted and encountered with as much precision as his adversary, and at once opened his attack. There was a flutter, not half a dozen passes were exchanged, and then I saw Davie's foil form a curve, and he fell back, calling to Perrotin, 'I've done it, han't I, sir?'

Perrotin, for reply, took Mr. Rogers courteously by the arm, and turning him towards us, pointed to a white spot upon his plastron.

'A palpable hit,' said Mr. Rogers, gravely laying down his foil.

Drench burst out laughing, for he took Mr. Rogers's gravity for a sign of mortification.

'Well,' said he, 'I think you might have held your own a little longer than that, Rogers.'

‘See if you can do better,’ said Mr. Rogers quietly.

‘’Twould be a poor compliment to Mr. Adams if I engaged him without putting his play to a better trial,’ retorted Drench, slapping on the mask.

Davie did not lose his self-possession at the prospect of meeting a more redoubtable antagonist, but went through the preliminaries as exactly as before. He engaged and opened the attack precisely in the same manner ; then followed the same flutter of weapons, and again he fell back with an appeal to Perrotin. Drench pushed up his mask and looked at the white mark on his breast in dismay. And now Mr. Rogers laughed.

‘I don’t care,’ cried Drench, throwing down his foil. ‘*You* couldn’t serve me that trick, Rogers, and I couldn’t have been hit in fair play—’tis a cursed French *botte*.

You ought to have recovered after that thrust,' he added, addressing Davie.

'Oh, I ought to have recovered!' said Davie, with an air of mystification, for he knew about as much of recoveries as I did. 'Then you don't think I hit you fairly, doctor?'

'Oh, of course it's fair enough, when a man is unequally matched, to employ a dodge of that kind; and I dare say the hit is expected and answered between Frenchmen.'

'But it wouldn't be considered fair between two English gentlemen? It's a sort of hitting below the belt, hey, doctor?'

'Something like that, to be sure; you see, after that thrust you were bound to recover: then I should have slipped under your guard and pinked you. That side thrust was one that no man in his senses would make, be-

Cause the recovery must lay him open, don't
you see ?'

' Yes, I see, doctor,' said Davie, in a tone
Of satisfaction ; ' I thought there must be
some trick in it, or our fine gentry wouldn't
be so ready to fight ; and I'm much obliged
to you, sir, for showing me. I have learnt
about enough for to-day, so I think, gentle-
men, if it's all the same to you, we'll go out
and take a breath of fresh air.—I'll follow
you in a minute or two,' he added, as we
moved towards the door. ' I have to settle
up with monseer, here, and then I'll join
you.'

' That's an honest man,' said Mr. Rogers,
when we were out of Davie's hearing, ' and
if he gains the victory, 'twill not be due to
any French *botte*, nor to your sagacity,
Doctor Drench !'



CHAPTER XI.

DAVIE GIVES FALKLAND HIS LAST

INSTRUCTIONS.

AS we walked on the lawn we heard now and then the voice of Monsieur Perrotin, raised high in remonstrance, but after a time these sounds ceased to reach us, and we saw him through the open gateway, seated in the gig, with his case of rapiers on his knees and his hat pulled low over his brow. The gig moved off, and Davie came through the gateway towards us.

‘You must make an excuse to leave at once, Drench,’ said Mr. Rogers, ‘and I will

go with you. Adams will want the rest of **t**he day to spend with his daughter.'

Drench, who was thoroughly crestfallen, **a**ssented humbly, and when Davie came up, **l**ugged out his watch, and declaring he had a **p**atient at the point of death to see, begged **p**ermission to go without further ceremony; **w**hereupon Mr. Rogers said, if his patient **l**ay in the direction of Sevenoaks, he would **t**ake a seat with him in the coach, as he had **a**n affair to transact there.

'And if 'tis no inconvenience to you, **D**rench,' said I, 'I will take the third seat.'

'Gentlemen,' said Davie, 'I will not **p**retend that I wish to detain you, for I also **h**ave affairs to look to. I shall be up **b**e-times, and there will be breakfast on the **t**able for those who can eat. Mr. Falkland, sir, you I hope to see to-night, as there are **c**ertain matters in which I desire your

I promised to return by ten o'clock, and after a few more words we went to the coach-yard and parted with Honest Davie.

‘Stop in the village,’ said Drench, ‘I must have some brown brandy. I am sick to think of what I’ve done. If I live to a hundred, I shall never forget the look of that man’s face when he thanked me for showing him that the trick he had been taught was unfair. He was really grateful to me: he shook my hand honestly. Devil take me! I’ve not made many mistakes in my life—for a doctor—and if I’ve killed anybody, it has been in the way of business; but this is worse than all the rest put together, for here have I killed a man in full health and in friendship.’

I bade the two men farewell at the inn, wishing to be alone, and wandered I know

not whither, aimlessly, and with a dull heavy sense of despondency and sorrow.

'Twas by accident alone that I made a circuit which brought me to the little wood below the Hall, and being there, I failed to recognise the path I walked, though 'twas one I had traversed a hundred times when the Hall was my home ; but coming suddenly upon an opening, and raising my eyes from the ground, I perceived the old house before me, and not a stone's-throw distant. What should I do? Turn about and get back into the fields I had crossed? No ; it would be pleasanter to rest here and look at the house and dream of Delia. A little to the right there was fine grass with a screen of brake before it. From there I could see anyone coming from the house, and be able to escape unobserved, for the main path was at some little distance, and a thick growth of brake and bramble lay between it and

me. I stepped out of my way and threw myself on the grass.

There I lay for some five or ten minutes, and then I was startled by the sound of voices, Delia's and Davie's, as I quickly recognised. They were coming along the path I had left. It had not occurred to me that they might be in the wood. I was so sheltered by the undergrowth that they must pass without seeing me, unless they left the path; but I could not lie still without trying to get a glimpse of my sweet Delia, so, as they came quite near, I turned my body a bit and raised myself on my hand. A twig broke under my hand. Delia ceased to speak, and through the growth I saw that they had stopped at the sound.

'Tis a squirrel, I warrant,' said Davie. 'Let us sit here, my dear, and watch for him. They are the prettiest little creatures

in the world, and will come quite close to you, if you sit still. There, this bank is quite dry, and as pleasant a sort of seat as any you can find—and quite dry, too. No dew to-night, dear; 'tis a sign of rain to-morrow. What a thing Providence is, Delia!—bountiful, but never wasteful. When the morrow is to be hot, Providence waters all the little herbs with dew; when 'tis to be wet, the dews are laid by for another day. I don't see our little friend, do you, dear? I wager he sees us with his sharp little black eye, though maybe he has run into his hole, which might well be that one in the oak yonder, just over the fork of the boughs—to see that his young'ns are well at home and safe.'

'How full of life the American woods must be!' said Delia.

'Why, as for that, dear, all woods are full of life—if you only open your eyes to look

for it. But why do you think American woods must be more so than others, Delia, hey?"

'I have been reading about them to-day, dear ; and do you know, dear, I—I think I should like to go to America. Not to live there altogether, you know, but to see the great rivers and the wide, wide prairie lands, and the enormous trees.'

'To say nothing of the lions and the tigers and the savages,' said Davie, laughing heartily. 'Why, you little madcap! what notion is this you have taken into that little head of yours?'

'A notion that I cannot get out of it, papa. You know how whimsical I am, how headstrong and inconstant. You were quite right when you spoke of my projects as a kind of caprice ; though I recollect I felt angry at the time that you treated lightly something which seemed to

me so serious. I am capricious—I begin to see that now, dear, because my caprice has led me into a very dangerous pass.'

'And what pass may that be?' he asked, with quiet gravity.

'My betrothal to George—to Mr. Falkland,' Delia's voice trembled a little, 'which must lead to our marriage, unless we go away.'

'Don't you love him, Delia?' Davie asked, in the same earnest quiet tone.

It was a direct question which could only be answered truthfully. Delia held her tongue.

'Don't you love him?' he asked again.

She waited a moment, and then she said, with trouble in her voice :

'Yes, I do love him.'

'Thank God!' said Davie.

'But, don't you see,' she pursued in a

lighter spirit, 'tis just that which makes marriage dangerous; for if, after all, my love is but a caprice—like my fancy for modelling, which seized me so strongly and left me so suddenly—which may endure but for a little time—think how terrible that would be for him, if we were married. Supposing a year after our marriage he should find that his wife no longer loved him, how wounded and how astounded he would be!

‘I should think he would.’

I fancy that if I could have seen Davie's face at that moment, I should have seen on it a ludicrous expression of suppressed merriment.

‘And that is why,’ Delia went on hastily, ‘I think it would be better to break off our engagement, or, at least, postpone our marriage until some future time, when I shall be more settled and reliable, you know;

and so, dear, I think I should like to go to America, if you will humour me once more.'

'You would go with me alone?'

'Yes. We understand each other so well, and you are so patient with me, and tolerate my changeable temper as no one else would. And we have always been very happy together, dear,' her voice shook, and grew faint again. 'And I think I could go on to the end of my life as we have gone hitherto, running about from place to place, and buying whatever pleased our eyes, and amusing ourselves with constantly changing faces, and carrying out any notion that chanced to come into our thoughts.'

'You think you should be content to have me always for your companion, Delia? and would like to fly away from all the world, as it were?'

‘Yes,’ faintly and faltering she spoke.

‘You would go away to America—to-morrow, say?’

‘To-night, if you will : the sooner the better.’

‘And you will not tire of me?’

‘No, no, no ! My love for you is no caprice.’

‘Dear child, dear child !’ he murmured, in a voice as broken as hers, and I heard the sound of a muffled kiss, as though he were kissing her hair. ‘Caprice lodges in thy head, and does not touch thy heart, and thy love for no one will change ! Come,’ he added, after a minute’s silence, in which I heard my Delia sob, ‘come, dear. The sun has sunk, and a cool wind creeps. We shall surely have rain to-morrow.’

I saw them descend the path together and cross the lawn. Davie stepped out of his way to pick a flower or two, and these


he put into Delia's hand as they were about to enter the house.

' 'Tis his last gift,' thought I.

As the clock struck ten I entered the house. The servant told me Mr. Adams was alone in the library, and there I found him seated at the table poring over a book. A few papers were ranged in front of him neatly.

'I am not too early, Davie?' said I, in a tone of interrogation.

'Not a moment,' said he; 'I have been reading this last half-hour. 'Tis right to read the Book at such a time as this. There is a wonderful deal of comfort to be got from it when a man's in doubt. I've been reading about the Philistines and the Egyptians, sir, and it pleases me to find that Providence don't object to fighting—and there seems to have been a good deal of it, too.' He laid the Book aside reverently. 'Delia went to bed at nine o'clock,' he said,



changing the subject, 'more composed and peaceful in her mind than I have seen her since she learnt of this charge against me, and her heart overflowing with love for you, sir, and me. Had I loved her less, I might have taken advantage of her devotion. With all the world against me, she would have stood by me till the last, sacrificing every youthful hope for my sake, and growing old and cheerless in her devotion to me. While a shadow of suspicion rested on my name she would never have married you. In that she has more pride than you. And this brings us to the matter I wish to talk with you upon.' He turned to the table, and laying two papers, neatly tied with red tape, upon the table between us, he said, designating each in turn, 'There's Mr. Bond's will, and there's mine. I thought 'twould take me half the night to make out mine, but 'twas so simple, and there was so

little to say, that I writ it in ten minutes. Mr. Rogers and the doctor shall put their hands to it to-morrow morning, and then 'twill be settled. I've been careful about the date, and I've writ it large, so there'll be no mistake. I don't think I have anything particular to say concerning the contents of it, except that I should like your aunt to be treated handsome——'

'Lady Kestral,' said I, 'is unworthy of any kindly consideration. This morning I showed her that it lay in her power to prevent this duel, and she has not spoken a word to save you.'

'Poor soul!' said Davie. 'The woman must be very unhappy who has lost all feeling of kindness for her fellow creatures. Who would change places with her, sir? Not I—even if I were a thief.'

I was silenced by Davie's charity; and after a space he proceeded:

‘I would like her to have what small comfort money can give her ; and I know, sir, that when you see things clearly you will recognise that my wishes are no more than just. So no more of that. These two papers I shall put into your hands before we start out, and you can give them to me again, if so be I come home safe and sound. But if I fall’—he stopped and drew a long breath—‘if I fall, sir, I want you upon that spot to open this will of Mr. Bond’s over my body, and read it, that all may know I am an honest man, and that your uncle may be punished in perhaps the only way he is capable of feeling punishment.’ He continued, with some excitement : ‘This is not what poor Delia would call a whim on my part, it is not even a wish to be treated dead as I have not been treated living, or a mere desire for revenge. It is for the protection of the dear girl I leave behind. When you

have read the will, I would have you, sir, take Squire Humphrey and his friends come hither with you and offer an apology to Delia for having wrongly treated her as the daughter of a thief. When that is done, sir, Delia will no longer refuse to be your wife, and you will be in a position to protect her. Do you understand me, Mr. Falkland ?

‘ Perfectly,’ I said. ‘ But if this will is to prove your honesty and to confound Lord Kestral, why should you not produce it yourself, and avoid a useless and perhaps fatal duel?’

Davie considered for a moment, and then said :

‘ I have thought it unwise to tell anyone why I have kept the contents of this paper secret : it has seemed to me part of my duty to keep it to myself ; and if I were not certain that you are really and truly my

friend and Delia's, I should not hint ~~at a~~ word of it. I need only tell you, sir, ~~that~~ the publication of that paper would ~~put~~ Delia under the power of Lord Kestral ~~and~~ his wife, to show you that I have ~~ample~~ reason for not showing it. If Delia ~~were~~ your wife, 'twould be another matter ; ~~but~~ she having no other protection than ~~mine~~, I was bound to be silent.'

I could say nothing, for as yet I did ~~not~~ grasp the full significance of this ~~statement~~.

'And you will see further, sir, why ~~I~~ I wish this paper to be read the very ~~moment~~ I am dead—if Providence does not ~~save~~ me—that the proof of my innocence ~~may~~ induce Delia to accept you at once as ~~her~~ husband and lawful protector.'

I think I assented to what he said, ~~but~~ my mind was distracted with ~~conflicting~~ ideas, and I know not how I ~~comported~~ myself.

‘That is all,’ he said, and then, looking around : ‘these papers Miss Dobson will look to ; and there are my keys : I will give them to you, sir, in the morning. And now I think we had better go and lie down for a while.’

‘Good night, Davie,’ said I, giving him my hand.

‘Good night, sir,’ he replied, holding my arm with one hand, and pressing my hand warmly with the other.

Then we separated, and I left him alone in the library.





CHAPTER XII.

THE DUEL.

I DID not undress, nor did I extinguish my light that night. I walked about the room ; I tried to fix my attention on a book ; I threw myself on the bed, trying to think calmly, and growing ever more restless. About midnight I heard Davie come upstairs and gently close his door. The wind rose, and towards morning I heard the rain pattering against the window-panes. It seemed to me useless to try to sleep, yet, nevertheless, sleep overtook me as I leant

back in my big elbow-chair, and I might have slept on till noon, had not I been awoke by a light rap at my door.

‘Yes, yes,’ said I, leaping up in a fright;
‘Here am I—what is it?’

Davie opened the door.

‘Mr. Rogers and the Doctor are here, sir,’ said he.

‘Good Heavens! and I asleep. What is the hour?’

‘Just gone six.’

He shook my hand. He was quite calm; there was no sign of agitation in his face, no tremor in his hand.

I hastily poured some water into the basin and dipped my face in it.

‘You will do well, sir, to put on your riding-coat, for it rains hard,’ said Davie.

I threw my coat over my arm and we left the room.

‘Softly, sir, as we pass her room,’ he whispered as we entered the corridor.

We approached the room upon tiptoe ; he fell behind as we came to the door. I didn’t look back, for I imagined he had stayed to catch the sound of her breath for the last time, or maybe to whisper some simple prayer for her happiness.

Coffee was served in the dining-room, and there sat Mr. Rogers and Drench in their long riding-coats and capes ; both were in full dress, as I saw by their swords sticking out beneath the skirts of their outer coats. A rapier lay on the table—Drench had brought it, mistrusting Davie’s ornamental weapon.

‘Rogers and I have been doing our best to induce Adams to make that *botte*,’ whispered Drench ; ‘but he’s so d——d taciturn one can’t tell what he means doing ; and he’s too much of a gentleman to let us

know if he disbelieves what we have said in behalf of the French trick. You must do what you can to persuade him.'

Davie entered the room at this moment, and Drench began stirring his coffee vigorously.

'I want you to give me a moment in the library, gentlemen, before we start,' said Davie. 'There is no great hurry; 'tis but twenty after six, and the coach will take us to our ground in a quarter of an hour.'

He helped himself to coffee, and when he had drank it we all rose and went into the library.

Davie unlocked his desk, took out the two papers, and having again turned the key, laid the bunch to which it was attached on the table beside Mr. Bond's will. Then, removing the tape from the other and turning down the bottom fold, he said :


‘ This is my will, gentlemen, and I beg you to witness my signature.’

He wrote his name in a great legible hand, and Mr. Rogers and Doctor Drench put their names below it. Davie thanked them, and having dusted the signatures with a pouncet box, he refolded the paper, tied it up, and put it with the other in my hand with a significant smile. Then he gave me his keys, and, turning to his seconds, said :

‘ Now, gentlemen, I think we had best be moving.’

In the entrance hall he stopped and looked round about him, taking a last look at his home ; his lips were closely set and his nostrils expanded, but there was no other sign of the emotions that must have stirred his heart.

We went out by the little door on to the terrace and so to the courtyard, where the



chariot was waiting. The hack that had brought Mr. Rogers and Drench stood hard by, and the doctor, slipping aside, opened the door, and brought out a case.

‘May I ask what you have there, sir?’ asked Davie.

‘A little apparatus which I usually carry about with me,’ replied the other, shoving it into the chariot, with a forced laugh.

It was his case of surgical instruments ; I knew the look of it well enough.

I sat upon the seat next to Davie, but I kept as far away from him as I could, for I shivered like one in a quartan, and could by no means control my muscles.

‘It wants five and twenty of seven,’ Davie observed, as we left the drive, and I think those were the only words spoken on the way.

We looked out of the windows at the dripping trees, the cows taking shelter

from the driving rain, the dark low stretch of leaden clouds, and the misty distance, and these all blurred by the drops of water on the glass, that grew larger and larger and then broke away and ran in zig-zag courses down the panes. We passed through the village. Not a soul was moving ; underneath an upturned cart a group of hens and a cock stood in wretched stillness. We made our way through a flock of sheep, driven by a shepherd hooded in an old sack ; the sheep ran up the banks snatching a mouthful here and there, as if they had no time to waste. The wheels made a constant crunching noise as they ground through the sodden lane. Such trifles as these attracted my attention and occupied my thoughts as we drove along, but my spirits were oppressed with a dull leaden weight of despair and grief.

The driver slackened his pace, and we

turned round and passed the little lodge, which I recognised as the place where I had written my notes to Lord Kestral. I was astonished to find that we were close to our destination. The gate-keeper held the gate wide and pointed along the drive, and the horses again broke into a trot.

A servant stationed in the path signalled the driver to stop, and the chariot being brought to a stand, the foot-boy opened the door, and we got out at some twenty yards from the house, where a side path led to the grounds in the rear.

‘You will stop here,’ said Drench to the driver.

The servant who had stopped the carriage led the way. Davie and I followed, and Mr. Rogers and Drench brought up the rear.

Turning an angle, we came into a straight path, and there in the distance we saw a party of gentlemen trudging along before

us. My heart fell within me at the sight, but Davie looked at them unmoved. I heard Drench grumbling to Mr. Rogers in a low tone—he was complaining, as I know now, of the long distance it would be to carry a badly wounded man.

We passed a wicket and entered the paddock. Turning to the right, we perceived the other party grouped in the angle of the field, where 'twas somewhat sheltered by tall hedges from the driving rain. My uncle was supported by quite a large number of friends—eight or ten, maybe—and all men whom I had seen at Davie's table.


'I object to this,' exclaimed Drench. 'This is not a ring fight, and I shall refuse to let you take the ground, Mr. Adams.'

'Do nothing of the kind,' replied Davie. 'I only regret that there are not ten times the number ;' and he looked at me significantly.

We were now quite close to the party, and Squire Humphrey, with Mr. Shotter, stepped forward, and were met by Mr. Rogers and Drench.

Davie waited with his hands behind him, and his eyes fixed on Lord Kestral. My uncle was standing in an easy attitude, with his rapier under his arm and his snuff-box open in his hand, chatting to a gentleman, with a superb look of careless indifference in his lifted eyebrows and the fixed smile upon his face, which was never more hideous or contemptible to my eyes. His profile was to us, and against the dark foliage I traced the line of his retreating forehead, his long hooked nose, his thin straight upper lip, his receding chin, and the loose folds of his vulture-like throat, which no cosmetic art could disguise.

‘Lord Kestral demands if you are prepared to offer an apology,’ said Mr. Rogers.



‘No, I am not,’ replied Davie, with composure.

Mr. Rogers took the message to the seconds, who carried it on to Lord Kestral. His lordship heard what they had to say, shrugged his shoulders, spoke a word, tapped his snuff-box, closed it, and put it into his pocket.

And now Drench helped Davie to take off his coat, and I, who had always thought of him as a cool and somewhat callous person, was surprised to see how nervous and troubled he looked at this moment. He was only less violently agitated than I was.


‘For God’s sake, Adams,’ I heard him say, in a low voice, ‘do not scruple to make use of all you know, or I shall count myself amongst the most unhappy and unfortunate of men.’

‘I’ll do the best an honest man may,’ Davie answered.

Lord Kestral had his coat off, and was looking towards us, with his little eyes half closed.

Davie turned to me, and our hands met in a close warm grasp. His mild eyes were full of affection. He opened his lips, as if to bid me good-bye, but the words did not leave them, and the only expression of our feelings was in the little nod with which we parted. Then he turned to Drench, and shook his hand, and having done the same by Rogers, he faced about, grasping his sword, and with his features set in manly sternness, his head erect, and a step as firm as that of a soldier on parade, he stepped out, with the doctor on one side and Mr. Rogers on the other, to meet my uncle.

I could not wait to see more. I was sick at heart. I hastened towards the wicket, nearly falling over Drench's case of instruments, which he had brought down under



his cloak, and laid upon the grass some few feet from where we had come to stand.

At the wicket I turned, a grim fascination being upon me. Davie was saluting ; the seconds were retiring ; and my uncle was for the first time looking serious, for doubtless he was astonished to find that Davie went through these preliminaries with address.

I made another step, and the hedge was between us. And now I leant with both hands on a railing that ran along on the inner side of the hedge, for I was giddy and faint, and the ground seemed to be moving under my feet.

There was a dead silence, only broken by the 'pat, pat, pat,' of the rain upon the broad leaves of a chestnut close by. I listened to this pattering until suddenly the click of the swords engaging fell sharp and

clear upon my ears, and after that I lost the pattering of the rain, and was deaf to every sound but that of the swords. That little sound pricked my failing spirits into life. I could not see through the hedge, but a little in front of me was a page boy from the house, who had mounted upon the railings, and was peering over the hedge at the combatants, and I watched his face as an index. He was so engrossed in the preparations that he had not seen me pass the wicket, and was unaware of my proximity. He watched with round eyes; his mouth was wide open.

‘Tip, tip—tip, slit—tip, tip — tip, slit,’ sounded the rapiers on my ears, and the boy’s face was rigid as marble.

‘Tip—slit, slit, slit—’ and then the boy’s round eyes winced—his mouth and face contracted as with a spasm.

At the same moment my ears caught a



short sharp cry, a struggle of feet and a heavy thud, and then the voices of the seconds all raised together, and the hurried tread of many feet.

The boy had dropped from the railing and was running up the path with all speed towards the house.

I rushed into the paddock. Where I had last seen Davie standing was a group of gentlemen; on the outside stood my Lord Kestral, wiping his sword with a bloody handkerchief.

‘Falkland, Falkland!’ cried Drench and Mr. Rogers together.

‘Here!’ I answered.

‘Quick, man—he uttered your name.’

The men fell back, and I threw myself upon my knees beside Davie. He was lying with his left side a little raised, his head resting in the hollow of Mr. Rogers’ arm. There was a dark patch of blood upon the

bosom of his shirt and a drop was trickling from the corner of his mouth. He was livid and his eyes were nearly closed. I took his right hand and pressed it, saying—I know not what. He opened his eyes and they fell upon Lord Kestral, who had drawn near and was looking upon his work, and then they turned languidly to me. He recognised me; lifted his left hand a few inches towards Lord Kestral and let it fall; he tried to speak, there was a gurgling in his throat, and his head rolled heavily and fell back. I knew what he meant, but I felt that there would be time enough to clear his character when there was no longer hope of saving his life.

Drench had run for his case, and now returning, stooped over Davie's body and examined him; then, turning his ashen face to me, he said in a tone of subdued horror :
'Dead!'

There was an awful silence amongst us as we stood and knelt around that lifeless body ; the first to break it was Lord Kestral.

‘Poor devil!’ he said in a tone of indulgent pity.

I believe he only intended to appear magnanimous, and that he intended to hurt the feelings of no one ; but Drench fired up in an instant.

“‘Poor devil,” you d——d old rascal!’ he cried, leaping to his feet : ‘is that the way you speak of an honest man, whose shoe-strings you were not worthy to tie up ! Let me tell you that if he hadn’t been a better gentleman than you, you’d have been the “poor devil,” at this moment. He could have pinked you if he would, and I’ll show you how, if you have the stomach for another turn with the irons.’

This tirade took the breath away from

most of those who heard it ; for nearly all knew Drench in his professional capacity, but had never heard him speak except in stilted language interlarded with medical jargon.

‘Come, Drench, your duty is here,’ said Mr. Rogers authoritatively, still kneeling by Davie’s body. ‘We must have help, Falkland, to carry the body.’

‘I ran off at full speed to fetch the footboys. Near the house I met a couple of men conveying a mattress, Squire Humphrey having already despatched a messenger to the men, who were prepared for this emergency. We hurried to the paddock, where Drench was now busily employed in doing all that the case required, and poor Davie’s body was presently laid upon the mattress and carried away.

‘The body can be taken into the house, I suppose?’ said Drench to Squire Humphrey.

‘Of course, if you have any hope; otherwise, I see no reason for it. You know my opinion of the man.’

‘Yes; and you know mine,’ said the furious doctor. ‘And I shall be glad to settle it with you when I’ve done with his lordship.’ He really seemed to be beside himself with chagrin at the calamity which he accused himself of having brought about.

Squire Humphrey made no response, and at Drench’s direction, and with his assistance, the body was placed in the chariot and was carried away, Mr. Rogers and Drench going with it.

‘You will do well to follow us presently, Falkland,’ Mr. Rogers had said to me. ‘You are unnerved, and can do no good. Miss Adams must be thought of, and you would only make her trouble greater by going to her now. Come on when you

are composed. We shall stop somewhere on the way—possibly at the inn; and I will go on and prepare Miss Adams for the news.'

I must have looked ill indeed; for, as I stood there after the chariot had gone, Squire Humphrey came to me, and taking me by the arm, said:

'You mustn't stand here, sir, in the rain; you are ill. Come into the house, I beg.'

'Yes,' said I, 'I will go in with you, for I have something important to say.'





CHAPTER XIII.

THE HUMILIATION OF LORD KESTRAL.

SQUIRE HUMPHREY took me into the house, and we passed through the hall, where some of the county gentlemen were taking off their cloaks and coats, into the breakfast-room, where the table was spread with chimes, pasties, and cold fowl, as if for a feast of rejoicing. The Squire himself brought me a dish of steaming coffee, and insisted upon my drinking it off. His manner was anxious and nervous; as, indeed, he well might be, for 'twas no light

matter to have had a man killed on his estate, and Drench's behaviour may have shaken his faith in the justice of Lord Kestral's quarrel.

'Do you feel easier, sir?' he asked, as I laid down my cup.

'Yes,' said I. 'Where is Lord Kestral?'

'He is changing his clothes, probably. He will have to keep out of the way until this affair has blown over.'

A servant came up and told the Squire that the post-chaise was at the door.

'Lord Kestral has something to learn before he goes,' said I, starting up.

'He will not go before he has eaten something ; he will be down in a few minutes, and if you have anything to say to him, you can say it here,' replied the Squire.

'Good !' said I, taking my seat again.
'Tis a matter in which others are con-

cerned besides my Lord Kestral,' and there-with I pulled the two papers from my breast with trembling fingers, and laid them on the table before me.

I, of course, had formed no definite plan of procedure. I could only vaguely surmise what Mr. Bond's will would reveal. But I felt sure that it would clear Davie's character from all suspicion of dishonesty. I did not intend any dramatic display; if I had any notion at all, it was that I would be guided by circumstances.

Having laid the papers on the table with a sigh, I raised my eyes, and found that I was the object of general attention.

The gentlemen had come in from the hall and seated themselves at the table; they had caught my words, and watched my action.

Seeing this, I said :

'These papers were given me by my

friend this morning before leaving his house. He expected to fall, and he desired that over his body I should read this will, which I believe is a testimony to his surpassing generosity and honour, not from any motive of self-glorification, not even from the laudable wish to be remembered with respect, but that you might at once do justice to that poor girl whose heart is to be smote with grief for her irreparable loss, and whom you and your wives and daughters have treated as the daughter of a thief.'

'I think I may say,' said Squire Humphrey, 'that our conduct was the natural consequence of Mr. Adams's persistent obstinacy in refusing to produce that evidence of his honesty which you have presumably under your hand. However, the question of justification will not be thought of at this moment, for I am perfectly sure

that no gentleman here, and no member — of his family, will fail to call upon Miss Adam — as, and do not only what is just, but what — is humane and kind towards her, if it — is proved that we have been in error, hey, , gentlemen?’

There was a unanimous nodding heads and expression of concurrence, and Squire Humphrey seemed vastly relieved.

‘It is the least you can do,’ I said, ‘for — though Lord Kestral shall be legally called to account for killing Mr. Adams, you are morally responsible for his death.’


‘I don’t see that, sir,’ said the Squire, whereupon his friends all shook their heads, and loudly murmured their dissent.

‘Do you pretend,’ I cried, addressing Squire Humphrey; ‘do you pretend to think that this meeting would have taken place if you had not taken up the cause of that drunken boy? Perhaps you have not

told your friends that Mr. Adams refused to meet Lord Kestral until you intimated to him that a refusal would be tantamount to an acknowledgment of guilt on his part. You said his refusal convinced you in your opinion of his dishonesty, and that you had observed to Lord Kestral that a man who would tamely bear a reputation for dishonesty would not risk his life to save his character from the stigma of cowardice. Those were your words. It was then, and not till then, that Davie accepted the challenge you had brought. Now tell me if you are not morally responsible for his death ?

‘ We have yet to learn,’ said Mr. Shotter, ‘ that the cause we sustained is unjust.’

‘ Yes,’ said I; ‘ you have yet to learn that the claim of a drunken boy, supported by the suspicions of his impoverished and needy guardian, is of less value than the



life of an honest man ; but I shall teach you the fact, I believe.' I cut the string that tied Mr. Bond's will. 'Though let me tell you,' I cried, 'that if my own feelings alone were concerned, I should scorn to rebut a charge which you would not have sustained had you been impartial judges. Is there one amongst you who would produce his title deeds if I charged him with holding an estate not legally his? Not one; and yet I am neither a drunken boy nor a needy and self-seeking timeserver.'

No one replied.

I opened Mr. Bond's will, and read it through. 'Twas all contained in one page. It confirmed a suspicion that had grown out of my last conversation with Davie the night before, and explained all that had hitherto seemed to me mysterious in his conduct.

As I finished it a servant entered the room, and said that a particular friend of

Lord Kestral's desired to see Squire Humphrey at once. He delivered this message, holding the door firmly with one hand, and blocking the way. At the same time, some rather dirty fingers, ornamented with a few gorgeous rings, were laid on the jamb, and a head craned forward over the servant's shoulder.

‘Only a vord or two, only a vord or two!’ pleaded the visitor.

‘If that is Lord Kestral's friend, open the door at once,’ said the Squire, rising.

The servant opened the door, and Lord Kestral's friend, with his hat in his hand, his head sunk in his shoulders, and a strenuous expression of mingled anxiety and amiability in his face, came forward. He was a stout man with large features, a pendulous under lip, and a drooping nose, and he spoke in a deep bass voice, with a slight lisp in his articulation.

‘Only a vord,’ he reiterated, meeting t ~~he~~
Squire and grasping his hand, which ~~he~~
retained, giving it an occasional shake as ~~his~~
feelings prompted; ‘*is* he killed?’

‘Who?’

‘Lord Kethtral, that vorthy nobleman; ~~is~~
he killed?’

‘No!’


‘God *bleth* him! God *bleth* him!’ ex —
claimed his friend fervently. ‘I heard ther ~~was~~
had been a duel between him and Mithter
Adamth, and I wath told that one of ’em
wath pinked, and I thaid to mythelf, thayth
I, “If itth Lord Kethtral,” I thayth, “I’m a
lotht man! God *bleth* him, and grant him
a long life, for I’ve got a lot of billth
againtht him.” Mithter Adamth I can
thpare: he don’t owe me nothing; but if
Lord Kethtral had gone down, it would ha’
broke my heart, it would.’

‘Is that all you have to say?’ asked Squire

Humphrey, disengaging his hand with some difficulty.

‘ Thatth all. My mind’th eathy now. I don’t want to bother him—not at all. The lawth of thith free country protect him from arretht. But you can tell him that I’ve got an executhion upon hith ethtate, and mutht put the bailiffth in hith houth to take care of the furniture, if the little bill drawed by Mithter Randle Bond, what Mithter Adamth refuthed to meet, ithn’t paid up by to-morrow at mid-day. Don’t want to bother the vorthy old nobleman, you underthtand, gentlemen—far from it, God bleth him!—and you can jutht tell him, thir, that Mithter Cohen called upon him—he knowth me ath if I wath hith his own fleth and blood; God bleth him! Good morning to you, gentlemen; and may good digethtion wait on appetite.’

He bowed himself out with these words, and Squire Humphrey sent the servant with



a sharp rebuke to the lodge-keeper for permitting anyone to enter.

I made no comment upon this incident; but I saw that it made Squire Humphrey and his friends ill at ease. The Squire walked up and down the room, looking every other second at his watch, and then going to the door to see if Lord Kestral was coming. Clearly, the news of the duel was spreading quickly, and it could not be long before the constables sought the survivor.

I cut the tape that bound Davie's will, and opened it. It was even shorter. He had taken Mr. Bond's will as his model, and in a few plain words bequeathed the whole of his estate to me. Following the bequest was this paragraph:

‘For reasons which will be understood after reading Mr. Bond's will, I leave nothing to Delia. She is betrothed to Mr.

Falkland, and will marry him, and may their union bring them perfect and enduring happiness. This is my last hope.'

As I folded up the paper the door opened and Lord Kestral entered. His lacquey had repaired some ravages that the rain had made upon his face, and he was once more radiant and smiling. The embarrassment of Squire Humphrey, the moody silence of the gentlemen around the table, seemed to astonish him. I imagine his intense vanity had led him to expect an enthusiastic reception and loud congratulations. He approached the table with the eternal expression of complacency about his mouth, but with more than one shift of glance to the right and left. I was at the lower end of the table and escaped his observation.

'My lord,' said I, 'I am about to read the will of Mr. Bond, that your friends and

you may know in what kind of cause you have taken the life of Davie Adams.'

My uncle wiped his eyes hastily, and putting up his glass, looked down the table at me. I opened the paper and read :

‘ “This is the will of me, Samuel Bond, of Fox Lane, Southgate, in the county of Middlesex. I give and devise all my estate and effects, real and personal, of which I may die possessed or entitled to, unto my faithful servant David Adams absolutely and without condition, and I appoint my said servant David Adams executor of this my will, and I hereby revoke all former wills and codicils.

‘ “To my wife Letitia I leave nothing. Her incontinence and the concealment of it before her marriage——” ’

‘ What is this ? ’ cried Lord Kestral indignantly.

I repeated the sentence, and said :

‘This should not surprise you, my lord; I told you yesterday, in asking you to withdraw your challenge, that the fact was acknowledged by Lady Kestral—that in my interview with her yesterday morning she promised to reveal it to you. She saw this will after her husband’s death and before her marriage with you. For her own selfish purposes she told me of this clause in the will months ago, and led me to suppose that it was to protect her from public shame and your resentment that Davie refrained from producing it. But it was not for that reason only.’

‘Be good enough to let a servant desire Lady Kestral to come down here at once,’ said my uncle to Squire Humphrey. ‘She must answer this charge herself. If it is true, I am a shamefully ill-used man; if it is false—as I believe it is—she will

deny it, and I am sure she will be believed.'

Squire Humphrey went to the door and sent a servant upstairs with the message; then he closed the door and returned to the table.

'You can continue, sir!' said Lord Kestral carelessly.

"Her incontinence and the concealment of it before her marriage with me," I read; "the forsaking of her legitimate child after ——"

'That's of a piece with the rest,' said Lord Kestral with a laugh.

I continued without heeding the interruption :

"And the irregular life she is now leading as a player in London, render her unworthy both as a mother and a wife of my consideration.

"My daughter, Delia, the legitimate off-

spring of my marriage with the said Letitia, I leave to the guardianship of the aforesaid David Adams, whose more than paternal tenderness for her since her abandonment by my wife has proved that he is the fittest and most trustworthy person for that office.”’

Lord Kestral dropped into his chair, as if stunned by this unexpected announcement.

““I bequeath nothing to my daughter,”’ I continued, reading the will, ““that her mother may have no inducement to withdraw her from the custody of the said David Adams.”’

‘The will is dated, and signed, and witnessed by a Dr. Blandly and the Rev. Benjamin Baxter. It is clear to you now,’ I said, looking round the table, ‘that you have supported the unfounded claim of a boy who has no title to your respect—

except as the bastard step-son of Lord Kestral.'

'It is a lie from beginning to end!' cried Lord Kestral, striking the table. 'Who shall prove that the will is not a forgery made by the man Adams to provide for his daughter in the event of his failing to kill me in this duel?'

'That can be proved—and shall be,' said I, 'before the end of the day. The birth was undoubtedly registered, and Dr. Blandy it was whose greeting informed you that Mr. Adams was that Honest Davie you had hoped to find.'

'Gentlemen!' exclaimed Lord Kestral, after a moment's consideration, in which he clearly saw the folly of bravado, 'I demand your sympathy: I am a much injured man.'

'You are injured by yourself alone!' I cried. 'In her own interest, Lady Kestral would never have encouraged the ground-

less claim of her son. 'Twas you who urged him on, and excited his cupidity, with the view of extorting money from Davie Adams. You might have succeeded had your step-son been as astute as you, for Davie would have sacrificed much to hide your wife's shame ; but the cub grew ungovernable, and forced you to this climax.'

Lord Kestral stood up, and would have spoken, but that anger paralyzed his tongue.

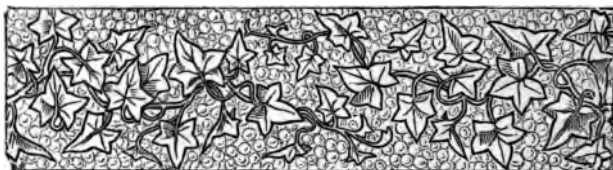
At that moment, the servant who had been sent to seek Lady Kestral entered the room.

'Throw open the door ; let her come in !' cried Lord Kestral.

The frightened servant threw the door open ; no one came in.

'Where is she ? Where is my wife ? Where is Lady Kestral ?'

'Go—go—gone !' answered the fellow, stuttering with terror.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEPARTURE OF LORD AND LADY KESTRAL.

‘**G**ONE! what do you mean by that?’ asked Lord Kestral.

‘I do’ know, your lordship; that’s what Bessy chambermaid told me to say. ‘Taint no fault of mine,’ he added, edging away from my uncle and appealing to the Squire.

‘Do you mean that her ladyship has left the house?’ asked Squire Humphrey.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Who saw her go?’

‘Bessy chambermaid, and Jim the shoe-boy, sir.’

‘Fetch them here at once.’

They presently entered the room, and I recognised in Jim the boy whom I had seen perched on the rail during the fight. They both seemed to be in mortal fear of Lord Kestral—I know not why. Perhaps the instinct is not confined to dogs, which leads them to know and fear persons who are treacherous and spiteful towards them.

Squire Humphrey addressed the girl, and asked the same question he had put to the man.

‘Her ladyship went away half an hour ago,’ the girl said.

‘Did she leave any message?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Did she go on foot?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Didn’t she ask to see anyone?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Speak up, girl. No one will hurt you. Tell me what you know about her ladyship’s departure.’

‘Well, sir, last night she bade me call her at six ; and when I went to her this morning, she told me there was going to be a duel fought, and promised to give me a crown if I could find out where it was to be fit, and let her know which gentleman won—his lordship or t’other one—but she never gave me the crown, sir.’

‘I was to had a shillun on it, but ne’er a penny have I got,’ remarked the boy.


‘Go on, girl.’

‘When Jim brought word how it had ended, I ran up and told her ladyship. She was dressed, and all ready to go ; she had her bonnet and gloves on. She had the window wide open, and she sat there with the rain a-beating in on her fine feathers—a sight to

see ; and she had a basin on her lap, and was slopping the water over her face, for all her pink gloves, and the water running down over her dress, and her face all black and red, like I never see ! And when I told her, she jumped up, taking no notice of the basin in her lap, which fell on the floor and broke in a dozen bits, enough to wake all the young mistresses, though they do sleep so heavy nowadays ; and she began to talk a lot of stuff as hadn't neither head nor tail, for what I could make out.'

'What *did* she say ?'

'Why, sir, one moment she said as she was going to play Mrs. Pinchwife, and then she fell to laughing, and ran across the room and out on the landing, and I do think she'd have thrown herself down stairs if I hadn't a-held her, saying as she could fly like a moth, so be I'd let her. Then she said as she was going to be married now she



was at last a widow, and would marry Mr. Adams, if so be she could find none better.

“ “ Why, your ladyship,” says I, “ Mr. Adams is killed.”

‘ She stopped when I told her that, and held her forehead in her two wet hands; then says she :

“ “ If he’s dead, I will go and throw myself on the protection of my daughter.”

‘ We was in the hall then, and she ran out of the house, and I see her going down the drive, staggering from one side to the other, and just then one of the gentlemen ran into the house to bid Thomas and Blake carry the mattress down to the paddock, and I see no more of her ladyship, for when I went back to the door and looked down the drive, she was gone.’

‘ Didn’t you make any effort to stop her—didn’t you call your mistress ?’

‘ Lord, sir, there was no holding of her.


She was as strong as a man—Jim there see how she tore herself away and flung me back when I laid hold of her.'

'That she did, a good'ne,' Jim said, with a broad grin.

'And I din't know what to do. I din't like to call mistress, for why—though I don't like to say it before you, my lord—there was no mistake about it : her ladyship was in liquor.'

There was a rap at the open door, and the lodge-keeper came in, hat in hand, and panting for breath, as if he had been running.

'Ask your pardon, gentlemen,' he said, 'but if you please, sir, here's Mr. Harley's two shepherds brought Lady Kestral to the lodge, and there she be now. They found her pretty nigh smothered in a ditch, and she seems like as if she was out of her mind, she do, sir.'



Lord Kestral listened to this announcement as he had listened to the former, in seeming apathy. He sat sideways by the table, with one hand resting upon it ; his little humid eyes were fixed upon me.

‘ You hear, my lord,’ said Squire Humphrey, stopping on his way to the door ; ‘ your wife is ill.’

‘ I hear,’ he answered, without moving or turning his eyes from me. ‘ ’Tis another of her Jezebel tricks.’

‘ Do you wish her to be brought into the house ?’

‘ No. Be good enough to let your fellows put her in the chaise. I will follow you. I have a word or two to say to my nephew, here.’

Squire Humphrey made no objection ; indeed, he looked to be not ill-pleased that his offer was declined. He left the room fol-

lowed by his friends, and Lord Kestral and I remained alone—he at one end of the table, I at the other.

‘You seem to be thoroughly conversant with this dead gardener’s affairs,’ he said. ‘Perhaps you may be able to tell me how he has disposed of his property?’

‘I can.’

‘Will you tell me what provision he has left for his master’s wife and child?’

‘He has made no provision whatever for them,’ I said. ‘He has left the whole of his estate to me.’

‘Ha!’ he exclaimed, with a sneer. ‘I did you an injustice. You are not such a fool as I thought you to be. You’ve managed this business exceeding well—so far as the gardener was concerned; but how about your uncle?—Do you think you have done with me?’

I rose from the table without replying,

put the papers in my breast, and buttoned my coat.

‘I find it difficult to believe,’ he pursued, ‘that a man who was so attached to his master’s wife and child left them without a farthing. I am inclined to think he must have made some stipulation which you overlook. You may have to marry my step-daughter, for instance——’

‘I shall marry her,’ said I.

‘That depends. I may choose to take her with me upon my forced voyage. She is pretty, and will be an agreeable companion. You know that the law gives me some authority over her, I suppose?’

‘You will have to answer for the death of Davie before you can prove any legal authority over her; and by that time she will be my wife,’ I cried.

‘Ah! we shall see,’ he said, rising from his chair with an air of composure and self-

satisfaction which it was impossible to believe unassumed.

I went towards the door in angry haste.

‘Pardon me,’ he said, raising his hand.

I stopped, wondering what he had to say. He made a very lofty movement of his head, and marched out of the room before me.

The rain still fell heavily and steadily. I heard my uncle cursing as I passed him ; he had not considered that he should have to walk through the rain to the lodge, or he would not have sent the post-chaise on in advance. The stoutest coat was not proof against the persistent downpour.

The chaise stood against the lodge. As I drew near I could see by the movement of the gentlemen that my aunt was being carried to it ; I heard her voice—she talked ceaselessly. One brought a glass of water and passed it to her. She was

drinking with feverish eagerness, when I looked through the window. Her face was crimson: here and there were purple blotches; her clothes were saturated and smeared with mud. No sooner had she taken the glass from her lips than she began to talk—loosely, incoherently, addressing now one, now another, without purpose. She looked at me, but without knowing me, as it seemed, and when her husband came up she told him that Lord Kestral was dead, and that Davie would marry her, and give Delia a mother and a father as well—an idea that was more fixed in her mind than any other, for she had repeated it, as I heard, again and again, mixed with the most irrelevant matter touching her furniture, her dress, and the parts she had played, and would play again, at the little theatre in the Haymarket.

‘Your wife is delirious—she is in a high fever,’ said the Squire to Lord Kestral.

‘You will do well to obtain advice as quickly as possible.’

‘Sir!’ replied Lord Kestral, with grand formality—which would have appeared to any of us as most ridiculous and unseemly, had it not been for the tragic circumstances—‘Sir, I thank you for your advice, not less than for your hospitality and the support of your friends, and I wish you good-day.’

As a sheep-stealer being condemned to death puts on an heroic air and poses as a martyr when he is nought but a contemptible thief, so my uncle assumed a magnificent pomposity, and carried off the shame and mortification which a man of better feeling in his position would have suffered to be seen. He bowed to those before him with as much ceremony as if they were ambassadors, turned and spoke a word or two to the postboy, and then stepped into the chaise. My aunt drew her skirts

together coquettishly as he entered, for she certainly did not recognise him as her husband, and put her hand upon his arm as he took the seat by her side ; he removed it at once, and drew up the window.

The chaise started off, and we saw no more of them.





CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH GEORGE IS CHARGED WITH BEING
TOO CLEVER BY HALF.

SQUIRE HUMPHREY would have had me wait and take a seat in his coach, he being minded to go at once to the Hall and express his sympathy with Miss Bond, and his regret in having had a hand in this unfortunate business ; but I brusquely declined his offer, and left him without further ceremony. Now that I had discharged my duty to poor Davie, my whole thought centred upon Delia, from whom it would be impossible to

conceal for long her terrible bereavement. At that moment Mr. Rogers might be breaking the news to her. How would she bear the shock? How could she be reconciled to the loss of that dear friend, who had been more to her than father and mother, who had exposed himself to ridicule and insult for her sake, and, furthermore, laid down his life! My heart ached by the mere anticipation of her suffering, and my grief was rendered more poignant by the sense of my own loss ; for Davie had endeared himself to me, not only by those acts of generosity which I have recorded here, but by numberless thoughtful little services and testimonies of affectionate consideration in our daily intercourse, scarcely noticed at the time, but well remembered now. He was a man that one could laugh at now and then, and for that reason was far more lovable than if there


had been no weakness or imperfection in his character. I am not ashamed of the tears I shed as I walked along the sodden lane, and thought of all the good that was gone from the world with the life of poor Davie.

I heard footsteps approaching, and the sound of a man's voice, and I held down my head that I might not be seen weeping. The path was all blurred and indistinct under my eyes as I plodded on.

The footsteps came nearer ; suddenly they stopped, and a voice cried :

‘George ! where is my father?’

It was Delia's voice. I raised my eyes in astonishment. She stood before me wrapped in a long cloak, with the hood drawn over her head : her face was white and drawn, with a strenuous look of fear and anxiety. A few steps behind her stood



the gardener—'twas his voice, probably in pointing me out to his mistress, that I heard in the distance.

‘Where is my father, George?’ Delia faltered.

‘Have you not seen Mr. Rogers?’ I repeated.

‘I don’t ask for him: I ask for my father. He left the house with you this morning: where is he now?’

‘He went away with Mr. Rogers and the doctor half an hour ago.’

‘He went away! Do you mean he walked away with them?’

My voice fell.

‘They carried him away,’ I said.

‘The servants did not lie to me, then. He did go to fight a duel. And he is wounded!’

‘Yes,’ I murmured.

‘He is wounded slightly, dear, not dan-

gerously ; he will soon get over it ?' she asked, in a tone of supplication.

'I dare not bid you hope, Delia, love,' said I, holding out my hand.

'No, no!' she cried, starting back; 'I will not take your hand till I know more. Why don't you tell me the truth? Why do you prevaricate?' She stamped her foot angrily. 'Say at once there is nothing to hope for—tell me my father is dead.'

I could not summon the words to my lips.

'Or that he is dangerously hurt,' she pursued, after waiting a moment for my answer—'that there is scarcely any hope of his recovery, and yet that he still lives.'

Her voice dropped again to trembling petition, and she caught my hand up from my side, and pressed it eagerly.

'I lost my temper, George. I was wrong ; I thought you were going to tell me he was no more. But he is only wounded.' She

laughed hysterically. ‘Severely—yes, yes, I know that; but by chance he may recover—though almost by a miracle, he will be given back to me, dear. Tell me that, George!’

‘I cannot tell you that, Delia.’

She dropped my hand.

I dared not raise my eyes from the hem of her cloak, on which they were fixed.

There was a minute’s pause—a time of awful stillness and fear. Then, in a low, still voice, she said:

‘Dead!’

We stood there motionless and silent many minutes, as it seemed to me. When I raised my eyes I found her looking at me in apathy, as if unable to comprehend the ill that had befallen her. Presently she asked:

‘Where have they taken my father?’

‘To the village,’ I replied.

She turned about, and walked along

slowly, retracing the steps she had lately taken in such haste. I walked beside her in silence.

The gardener held his chin in his hand, and looked at us askant as we passed, and let us go on some distance before he followed.

Delia seemed unable to realize the fact even then, for presently she repeated the word 'dead' in a tone of bewilderment, and continued, as if explaining it to herself:

'Gone away, not to return ever; left me here, never to see me again. Dead! lost for ever! never to gossip with me about trifles, George; never to indulge my fickle fancies, nor scold me when I carry them too far; never to tell me about the growth of plants, and the things he loved with his simple, honest heart! And that heart beats no more; his lips are silent, and his kind eyes will never follow me again! Gone—gone! Oh, my God! why am I left?' Then,

with a long, low, quivering cry, she burst into tears.

What could I say to comfort her? All words seemed inadequate and vain. I drew near to her, and laid my hand upon her arm. She snatched her arm away, and, taking her hands from her face, looked at me in passionate anger and contempt.

‘Do not touch me,’ she cried; ‘you are base and cruel—false to me and to him. He was your friend, but you were not his, and shall not be mine. You knew how I loved him—how dear he was to me; you knew how he loved me—yet you went with him to his death; you stood by and saw him murdered; you concealed his danger from me, that I might not save him; you have not a wound, not a scratch, not a sign to show that you made any attempt to help him. Had you loved me in the least, you

would have thrown yourself between the sword and his body.'


It was not for me then to vindicate my action, or to show how inevitable the duel was.

'George,' she said, with resolution, 'I will never speak to you again;' and a moment afterwards her resolution gave way, and she cried, falling again into tears:

'Oh, there is not one friend left to me! All, all are gone from me!'

It is needless to relate the painful efforts I made to appease the unhappy girl as we walked to the village. A woman might have succeeded in soothing her troubled spirits; my words seemed only to provoke her grief.

In eight or ten minutes we reached the village and came in sight of the inn, whither I expected Davie's body had been carried. The blinds in the upper window were drawn



down, and despite the wet, a group of three or four men stood at the door, with their heads drawn together in whispered conversation. Catching sight of us, the gossipers entered the inn hurriedly. The next moment Drench came out.

Delia drew her hood lower over her eyes, and paused as if to gain strength. Then, with a deep-drawn sigh, she moved onwards again.

Drench came up and met us.

‘Here’s a morning! Upon my honour, Miss Adams, ’tis not fit for you to be out of doors.’

It was clear to me, from the tone he took, that he had arranged with Mr. Rogers to conceal the truth from Delia; and I would have made signs to him that she knew all, but he was so concerned with the state of his legs, having had the mischance to set his foot in a puddle, that he could look at

nothing else for a few moments as he walked along by Delia's side.

Delia made no reply to his observation, and he continued :

‘Mr. Rogers has gone up to the Hall to take the news to you, Miss Adams, but I suppose you have learnt it from Mr. Falkland.’

Delia sobbed, and dropped her head.

Drench looked at me in inquiry.

I nodded and frowned at him, to let him understand that she knew all.

He gave his head a contemptuous jerk, and gave me a look which was as much as to say that I was an idiot to have told her. Then he glanced sidelong at Delia, with the shrewd comprehensive expression I had so often detected in his face when my arm was in danger.

‘You know the worst, then, Miss Adams,’ he said tenderly.

She sobbed again.

Once more he jerked his head and drew down the corners of his mouth, projected his under-lip, and gave me a glance of contempt.

The group of idlers fell back as we came to the door of the inn. Drench led the way into the house.

‘I’ll make free to turn you out of your bar-parlour, ma’am, for five minutes,’ said he to the landlady, with a wink.

‘Oh, most certainly, to be sure, doctor,’ said she, opening the little side door in a flutter. ‘Will the poor dear young lady take anything?’

‘You can warm a little negus as quickly as possible, ma’am,’ he replied.

The good woman seized a bottle of port and a funnel, and trotted off to her kitchen as fast as her weight and the infirmity of her limbs permitted. When we were in the parlour, Drench shut the door, and bringing

forward the landlady's high-backed arm-chair, he said :

‘First of all, you must take off that cloak—not to spoil our landlady's chair—that is the string, I think? Allow me—so. Doctors are privileged, you know. Falkland, take this cloak in the kitchen, and hang it before the fire.’

He put the cloak in my hands with a vicious look, as if it gratified his spite to get me out of the room.

‘I should like to see him at once, doctor,’ said Delia plaintively.

‘So you shall, though it's a sad sight, just as soon as ever I see you strong enough. Ah ! here comes our fine old landlady. Tell her, Falkland, to keep out of the room till the negus is ready,’ and he quietly but firmly pushed me out of the parlour and shut the door.

When I went back, I found Delia seated

in the great chair, with her head bent down and her handkerchief in her lap, catching her breath now and then, but listening with some sort of composure to Drench, who, seated before her, was pouring out a string of trite and commonplace observations upon death and loss, such as any old woman might utter; but, oddly enough, they seemed to be the very kind of thing that Delia needed, which has never ceased to be a source of surprise to me, who know so well how highly cultivated is her mind, and how superior are her feelings to those of ordinary women.

‘Talks like a book, upon my word he do!’ whispered the landlady in my ear, with deep admiration in her glance, as she came in with the negus in her hand.

‘Ah, here is the negus!—thank you, ma’am,’ said he, pouring it out. ‘Not quite enough—about half a glass more, warmed

very gradually, so as not to boil out the spirit, and we shall be very much obliged to you, my good madam.'

This was clearly a ruse to get rid of the old lady, and keep her out of the way, for he was satisfied when Delia had taken but a quarter of the quantity that had been brought her.

'Now you feel stronger, don't you?' he asked. 'You look more yourself. I think you may put that handkerchief in your pocket.'

'I won't cry, doctor,' she said submissively. 'I think you may take me to see him now.'

'Very well ; but I want first to caution you against making a noise. You must go into the room as silently as ever you can.'

'Silently,' cried Delia, catching at the hope that word conveyed, yet not daring to express it in words.

‘ We have been talking a great deal about death and bereavement, and how hard it is to bear,’ said Drench ; ‘ and that I hope will lead you to understand the necessity of being cautious in even slight matters ; for a fatal result might have been averted from many a dangerous wound——’

‘ A dangerous wound ! Oh, doctor, is my father—is he—is he——’

‘ Is he wounded dangerously ? Yes, my dear young lady—he is wounded dangerously.’

‘ Oh, doctor, doctor !’ she cried, and catching up his hand, she took it to her lips and kissed it again and again. Then, turning upon me with angry eyes, she said :

‘ George told me he was dead.’

‘ I dare say he did ; but you see,’ he added with intense satisfaction, and nodding in my face, ‘ George is too clever by half !’



CHAPTER XVI.

DRENCH'S TYRANNY.

DRENCH would fain have kept me out of Davie's room, but I would not be denied the gratification of seeing the friend whom I had so lately mourned as dead, and I followed Delia and the doctor upstairs and into the darkened room. I saw Davie's head upon the pillow, and while I looked his lips parted and I heard him breathe ; satisfied with this evidence, I submitted to the silent direction of Drench, and left the room.

Delia had dropped upon her knees beside

the bed ; she was there as I closed the door, her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed in adoration upon Davie's face.

Downstairs I found Mr. Rogers questioning the landlady.

'She is upstairs, I am told,' he said, coming to me.

'Yes.'

'Thank heaven ! I went to the Hall to break the news to her, and found that she had left the house in a condition bordering on madness. The servants suspected what was going on. The lad who drove Perrotin to Maidstone learnt as much as he could tell him, and overheard Adams directing the coachman to drive to Squire Humphrey's. Of course, the maids no sooner heard of it than they carried the news to Miss Adams. Without waiting for a trap to be got ready, she took the gardener for a guide, and left

the house. Miss Dobson was then told, and as soon as the poor old gentlewoman could get dressed, she started in pursuit of Miss Adams. The coach must have passed you, or taken another road.'

'That's possible. But tell me about Davie—until ten minutes ago I thought he was a dead man. Drench declared he was dead in the field there.'

'I believe he thought so himself at first, though he declared to me after that he said so only to scare Kestral and his friends, and with some show of indignation asked if I thought he was such a consumed fool as to be deceived by a syncope, or to give up a good patient before every means to preserve him had failed. The fact is, I think the position of the wound justified his first opinion, for undoubtedly, had Kestral's arm been as vigorous as his hand was skilful, Adams would be dead now. If the steel

had gone half an inch deeper, Drench, with all his cleverness—and he is clever—could not have saved him.’

‘Was it long before he revived?’

‘We had not gone a dozen yards in the coach before Drench found signs of life. He happily had a brandy-flask in his pocket——’

‘I never knew him without it; but ’tis most part of the time empty.’

‘He had exercised some self-restraint, then, for it was full. I need not go into details—they are not pleasant.’ He moved his arm, which was, I perceived, plentifully stained with blood, and pursued: ‘When the coughing subsided, it seemed that the whole vital apparatus was relieved and free to act. He opened his eyes, and after a few minutes he spoke, and I may tell you that his first thought was of you. “Falkland?” he said, in a tone of interrogation. I told

him we had left you behind, and he nodded his head in contentment. What happened to you? As we moved off, it struck me that you stood more in need of Drench's help than poor Adams, for I protest I thought him dead. Come, let us sit down. I think this is the proper time to drink; and you shall tell me how you fared.'

We sat down, and I told my friend all that had happened at Squire Humphrey's, with a brief account of Lady Kestral's history—there now being, as I considered, no reason for further concealment—and of Davie's untiring devotion and constant fidelity. When I had concluded, Mr. Rogers meditated for some moments, and then, striking the table, said:

'By the lord, Falkland! I would sooner be that man than the most admired hero in the world. Could you use the pen but as well as you handle the chisel, I would have

you write this man's life and set aside your "mute inglorious Milton." For sure,' says he, 'there is more to ennoble us, and more to love, in contemplating the character of such a man as Adams, than in the noblest marbles of Phidias himself.'

These words made a deep impression on my mind, and I wished at the time with all my heart that I had the literary skill to do justice to such a subject.

At this point the bustling of our landlady to the door, together with the crunching of hoofs in the soft road outside, attracted our attention, and going to the window, I perceived Squire Humphrey with two of his friends pulling up before the inn.

I ran out at once, hoping to hear some tidings of Miss Dobson.

'Have you seen anything of Miss Bond?' inquired the Squire anxiously.

'Yes,' said I, in a low voice, and pointing

towards the upper window. 'She is here.'

'Thank the Lord!' he exclaimed; 'her governess is up at the house—at least, there I left her—and in a pretty taking, I assure you; for it seems her young lady got wind of the affair and left the Hall in a frenzy. A pretty to-do is here, upon my soul! My wife and daughters are all in the megrims, or some other confounded fashionable disorder, and charge the whole of this unfortunate business on me, though 'twas to humour them that I took any hand in it. Well, well! there shall be no more lying abed o' mornings, and languishing about on sofas of an afternoon, I promise 'em, for I've had enough of the fashion to last me my lifetime, I have. If they don't choose to make butter they shall eat dry bread, as I tell 'em, and if they can't eat their dinner at two o'clock, like Christians, they shall go

without it. They brought poor Adams here?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ An honest man as ever breathed, and if I had followed my own leading this would never have come about. The parson shall preach about Samson every Sunday betwixt this and Michaelmas, that I bear in mind the folly of giving way to a wife. Ah, I spy the top of a coach over the quickset yonder—’tis Miss Thingamy, I warrant, and now there’ll be another scene! Well, I’m richly served for misdoubting an honest man, and putting my trust in princes.’ He spoke so fast and continuously—being warm with wine, which he had probably taken in excess to forget the misfortunes of the morning and the unjust reproaches of his family—that I had no chance of speaking. He continued : ‘ The best thing I’ve done this morning was to frighten young pudge

out of his wits—you know who I mean—the bastard that's helped do this business. I found him sneaking in the kitchen, inquiring of the servants as to what had taken place, and I warrant you he didn't stay long after I found him. I told him what *he* was, and I told him what *his* mother was, and says I, "The best thing you can do is to follow your stepfather out of the country, and run shy of the constable, and that pretty quick too, for if I find you on my estate after five minutes, you shall have a souse in the horse-pond." He didn't wait to be twice warned, but scuttled off as fast as his little legs would carry him.'

The Squire would have laughed at this reminiscence, but recollecting himself in time, turned it off with a cough, and gave his nag a switch.

' 'Tis she, sure enough,' he said, catching sight of the coach as his horse moved, 'and in

about two minutes we shall have the screaming and crying all over again. However, I'll stay it out, and I may as well get down and go in the house as linger out here in the rain, for I'm determined to make Miss Bond a handsome apology—he stifled a hiccough—‘a handsome apology—for my misconduct.’

‘You had better choose a more fitting opportunity,’ I suggested.

‘If that’s your advice, sir,’ he said cheerfully, ‘I will, most certainly; for, to tell you the truth, these events coming one a-top of the other have so upset me, that I’m like enough to make a fool of myself;’ then, giving a hasty glance at the coach, which was now close upon his heels, he said a word or two to his companions, whose red faces, sleepy eyes, and solemn silence showed that they also had been drinking heavily, gave his horse a cut, and the party scoured off.

Poor Miss Dobson's manner contrasted strangely with the Squire's, and with what he had anticipated. She said not a word. Fright and distress seemed to have deprived her of speech. Her hands were clasped together, and she looked at me imploringly as I went to the door of the coach. In a few words I told her that I had met Delia, that she was in the inn, and that Davie, though dangerously wounded, yet lived. The poor soul wrung her hands, and the tears ran down her cheeks, as she listened, and when I concluded, she wept afresh, and her trembling lips parted, as if to utter some word of gratitude to Heaven for the preservation of her good master and friend.

I took her into the little parlour, and there she stayed until Delia came softly down the stairs, followed by Drench, when she rose and went sobbing to meet her. The two women embraced, and Delia said :

‘Don’t cry, dear,’—her own voice was choked with sobs, for women must weep in simple sympathy—‘don’t cry. ’Tis all well now. I have seen him—I have heard him—he spoke to me in his sweet gentle manner, and gaily; and I have kissed him, and the doctor says he will grow strong, and come back to us again. Doctor Drench’—here she fell back and pointed affectionately to Drench, who had fallen to scratching the dry mud off his stocking—‘Doctor Drench has saved him. We owe him the life of my dear father, for he will not die now, will he, doctor?’

‘No! We may confidently hope that he will recover. But his life depends upon perfect calm, and for that reason, my dear young lady, I wish you to go home to the Hall with Miss Dobson, and leave our patient entirely to me.’

‘I will do whatever you bid me,’ she replied eagerly; ‘but you will let me see

papa sometimes, if I make no noise, and go directly you tell me?’

‘You shall see him this evening, and then you must not ask to visit him again for quite twenty-four hours.’

‘I promise that : you will find that I am not a foolish girl, and that I keep my word.’

‘Very good. Now go home with Miss Dobson as soon as you can—I see there is a coach waiting at the door—and eat a good breakfast; for your father must not see you with pale cheeks and hollow eyes, or it will retard his recovery.’

‘Ah! you shall see how well I look to-night. I am quite happy—happier than I have been for a long, long while. I have so much to hope for now. Come, dear,’ she added, turning to Miss Dobson, ‘lean upon my arm—all your weight; I am strong. Let us go at once;’ then, turning to Drench,

and with a sudden access of fear, 'but you will let me know if anything happens?'

'If there is any change for the worse I promise to let you know. I will send Falkland with a message.'

She pressed his hand warmly, and we all went out to the coach. I opened the door. She glanced at me and turned her eyes away angrily. When she and Miss Dobson were seated, Mr. Rogers, at my suggestion, took the third place, and I was taking off my riding-coat, which was now saturated with rain, in order to follow him, when Delia stopped me :

'Doctor Drench may want you ; you had better not leave the inn,' she said coldly.

'Very good,' said I. 'Certainly I shall not intrude where I am not wanted,' and with a stiff bow I turned away.

'Tis in the nature of those attacked by

fever to be hot and cold by turns, to be irritable and unreasonable ; and the fever of love had never a stronger hold of me than at that time : this is the only excuse I can find for taking umbrage at Delia's treatment of me. I did not consider then how all her thoughts and emotions were centred in the man she thought to be her father, nor how inexcusable in her estimation my seeming connivance at the duel must be ; nor did I make any allowance for her being alike under the influence of that fever which so disturbed my own judgment. I only conceived that I was prodigiously ill-used. She shook hands again with Drench before the coach started, which made me mad with a jealousy that now provokes my laughter, but then excited my spleen, to such a degree that I was heartily pleased when, the coach moving sharply before he expected it, his toes narrowly escaped being run over, and

the skirt of his coat was spattered and smeared with mud from end to side by the hind-wheel.

My ill-humour lasted about half an hour, and then I began to see my own folly, and wished for an opportunity of proving to Delia my tender consideration and submission.

About mid-day Drench, having been with Davie for the space of an hour, came down, and in reply to my question said that Davie had fallen asleep, which was the best thing in the world that could have happened to him.

‘I shall go up to the Hall and tell Delia,’ said I.

‘You’ll do nothing of the kind, if you please,’ he replied, in an authoritative tone. ‘In the first place, I said I should send you up if there were any ill news to report, and your presence would alarm her, and lead

her to suppose you were lying to spare her feelings ; and in the second place, I don't wish her to know that Adams is going on so mighty favourably, or there would be no keeping her out of his room. What a dullard you are, Falkland ! I have half a mind to take advantage of this opportunity—cut you out, and marry the girl myself ; for, begad ! she is too delicate for your keeping. That wench in the kitchen is more suited to such a husband as you will make.'

'What do you mean ?' I asked hotly.

'Don't you see that the girl's state is as critical as her father's ? She has eaten nothing for days, I'll take my oath, and she is supported by mere strength of will and mental excitement ; a little more would undo her. There's fever in the neighbourhood, and she is in just the condition to take it. Her mind must be relaxed, and her

body braced up, and you are about the very worst person in the world to be near her. For that reason I'm heartily glad she is offended with you, and if I can say anything to keep you two at a distance from each other, I shall say it.'

I resigned myself to his direction, but fretted impatiently at my forced inactivity, while Drench drank brown brandy, and smoked innumerable clay pipes of tobacco, and chatted freely with the landlady.

Mr. Rogers came in about one o'clock, and we three sat down to a dish of boiled pork which the landlady had dressed for us. He told us that he had taken breakfast with Delia, and left her in good spirits. After dinner, he took me aside, and told me that he would return to London, having learnt from Drench that, practically speaking, Davie was out of danger, if I had no further need of his services. I did not

oppose his departure ; and so, having sent on a boy with his valise, we walked together, in the afternoon, to Maidstone—the rain having given over—where we arrived in ample time for the evening coach. We parted with mutual hopes of soon meeting again under happier conditions, and I walked back to Maplehurst, there to find that Delia had made her visit and returned to the Hall in my absence.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLACK DEATH.

WHILE the landlady was giving me this information, Drench came downstairs. ‘Adams has asked for you,’ said he. ‘Come up with me ; but let him see you with a cheerful countenance, if you please.’

The room was wonderfully neat and tidy, for Drench was as good a nurse as he was a doctor ; the blind was drawn up, and on the dressing-table before the window were two pots of flowers—pansies and mignonette—Davie’s favourite plants.

I knew who had placed them there.

Davie greeted me with a glad smile, and a look of tenderness in his pleasant eyes. He raised his hand, which lay upon the coverlet, and pressed mine warmly.

‘I mustn’t move, and I mustn’t talk,’ he said in a feeble voice, turning his eyes with a smile towards Drench; ‘but I shall lie easier, having seen you, and be more at peace, knowing how matters stand.’ He glanced towards the flowers on the table, and continued: ‘She has been here, you see; it seemed queer like, not to see you by her side, sir!’

‘That’s enough, Mr. Adams,’ said Drench; ‘Falkland will do the talking.’

‘I did not expect Delia would come so early,’ said I, ‘and I have been to Maidstone with Mr. Rogers. Seeing that you were out of danger, and that he could not be of further service at present, he has re-

turned to London ; but he begged me to assure you that he would come and spend a longer holiday with us as soon as you could invite him to the Hall.'

'That won't be for two or three weeks,' said Drench. 'I shan't let my patient get on his legs till he is strong enough to stand on 'em. I doubt but 'twill be a month and more before we get ourselves into good fighting trim again.'

'That's of little consequence,' said I, 'for he'll find no one to fight. Lord Kestral, under the impression that you are a dead man, has taken flight ; by this time he is out of the country, and for his own sake he is likely to keep out of it. He hasn't a friend in this county, or anywhere else, I believe.'

'They've come over to us,' said Drench ; 'a score of people have called while you were away—there's a plateful of cards on the chest of drawers there. The whole pack

has turned, and Kestral is likely to share the fate of what's-his-name in Pausanias—Actæon, or somebody—who was devoured by his own dogs.'

'You can understand how this has come about. I had no hope of seeing you again, Davie, alive ; and——' I took the papers from my breast-pocket, and laid them on the coverlet.

'I have heard something about that paper,' said Drench, 'and I suppose I am about the only one now who has to take your honour on faith, Mr. Adams. If the contents of that document are no longer to be kept secret, I should like to read it, if you have no objection.'

Davie gave the paper, and Drench took it to the window to read—for the evening was now advanced and the light waning.

'She has learnt the facts,' Davie said, as I sat down by his side; 'learnt 'em, I dare

say, from the ladies who have called upon her. But it has made no alteration in her feeling for me.'

'It could only increase her love—were that possible — to know that you have done so much for her from love alone, and not from self-interest or duty.'

Davie smiled, and turned his glance towards the pansies, whilst the tears filled his eyes. After a minute or two of silence, he said in a tone of interrogation :

'Her mother?'

'Lord Kestral took her with him. You need be in no concern for her : my uncle will not forget your promise, nor fail to avail himself of it.'

I thought it best to say nothing of my aunt's illness at that moment. Davie seemed satisfied with my suggestion, and lay meditating in silence.

'Well !' exclaimed Drench, coming from

the window, 'all's well that ends well. If you hadn't fought, Mr. Adams, if you hadn't been wounded, and if I hadn't declared you dead, this wouldn't have come out, and you might have been badgered and tormented by that old fox and his adopted cub till human endurance could stand it no longer. But why on earth——' he paused, scratching his chin in perplexity. 'Ah, I see! if you had shown the will to the old man, he could have taken Miss Bond under his tender care, to say nothing of punishing her mother for the deception. Well, heaven be praised, all the difficulties are settled, and the devil has his due.'

'Aye, sir, thank Heaven !' said Davie.

Drench now insisted upon my leaving Davie. As I took Davie's hand, bidding him good-night, he said, with some anxiety in his weak voice :

'I believe that all danger is past for

Delia; but you will not lose sight of her, Mr. Falkland—will you, sir?’

I gave him my promise, and left the room with a lightened heart. I sat down with Drench for best part of an hour over a pot of tea—which drink he was vastly fond of—and I believe I should have fallen asleep in the chair had I sat there any longer, for I now for the first time began to feel the effects of the excessive exertion to which both my body and my mind had been put, and of the long absence of repose; but I roused myself, and going out into the yard, dipped my head in a bucket of spring water, to get rid of the drowsy feeling that had overtaken me; for not only had I promised Davie to keep Delia in sight, but my inclinations prompted me to see her if possible this night, in the hope that she would now regard my conduct in another light, and be more kind to me.

When I had smartened myself a little, I got my hat, and without a word to Drench, who, with his wig over his eyes, his head thrown back on the chair, and his hand still lying on his darling clay pipe, was sound asleep and snoring loudly, I slipped out of the inn and walked off towards the Hall.

A thick mist rose from the saturated earth, shedding a dim grey light upon the path, just sufficient to keep me from straying into the ditches, but not enough to make more distant objects distinct. The night was wonderfully still. The fall of a drop from the charged foliage over my head, the chiming of a distant clock, the crunching of the soft road under my feet—these were the only sounds I heard for the first ten minutes. Then I caught the sound of wheels coming towards me, and I fell to speculating whether the sound was of a waggon or of a coach moving slowly. It must have been far

away when I first heard it, for I walked five minutes, and still it approached. Then little by little it seemed to recede and grow fainter. I found the explanation of this mystery shortly, when I came to the crossing where the lane was cut by the road that runs from Maidstone to New Romney. The vehicle had turned aside here. I paused to listen: the sound was now so faint that I could not distinguish whether it came from the right or the left.

I went on, slowly at times, for where the lane was narrow and the hedges high it was impossible to see even the ground on which I walked. The clock chimed again; I began to speculate as to my whereabouts, thinking that possibly I had passed the Hall gates, when, to my relief, I heard the heavy steps of a man coming towards me. When the sound was quite close I stopped, and asked where I was.

‘Be that you, Master Falkland?’ replied a voice from the obscurity.

‘Yés.’

‘I thought I knowed your voice, sir. I were just a going for you, sir, seeing you’re wanted quick as possible up at Hall.’

‘Where is the Hall?—who wants me?’ I asked.

‘Hall be about quarter o’ mile up along, sir, and ’tis Miss Dobson as wants you.’

‘Has anything happened—is anyone ill?’ I asked.

‘Not as I knows on, sir—not more ’an ordinary; but such a lots of things have happened, and folks all round seems so upset likes, as it’s hard to say ’zactly what’s what.’

Without wasting time in further inquiries, I hurried on, and in a few minutes we reached the Hall. Miss Dobson, shaking with fear, met me at the door.

‘You have not met her, Mr. Falkland?’ she said quickly; ‘you have not passed the coach?’

‘I have met no one. What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Miss Bond is gone,’ she replied.

‘Gone!’ I cried, my forebodings of ill being realized—‘whither?’

Miss Dobson told me, in confused and broken sentences, that, feeling ill, she had gone to her room upon the return of Delia from the inn, and had there fallen into a sleep, from which she was awoke by hearing the sound of carriage wheels. She had rung her bell, and a servant responding gave a letter into her hand, saying that Delia had written it, and ordered it to be delivered to Miss Dobson should she awake, but that on no account was she to be disturbed.

‘This is the letter,’ she said in conclusion,

producing a crumpled paper, which in her disorder she had unconsciously been fretting in her hands.

I opened the paper and read :

‘DEAR MISS DOBSON,

‘I write this in case you may awake before my return. I beg you to be under no anxiety on my account. A messenger has brought me a letter informing me that my unhappy mother has been seized with a sickness, and lies now in sore need of help. I intend to bring her back with me, and, God grant, in a few hours.

‘DELIA.’

‘Who saw the messenger?’ I asked.

‘The maid. ’Twas a post-boy with the mails; he did not wait to give any account, having come out of his way to give

the letter, and starting off the moment 'twas delivered.'

'Tis a trick of my uncle's,' I cried ; 'a trap to kidnap Delia and carry her out of the country with him.'

I glanced at the letter again, hoping I had overlooked the name of the place where her mother was said to be lying, and finding none, I inquired of the servant which way the coach had turned after leaving the drive. She was not sure ; she thought by the sound it had turned towards Maplehurst. I then bethought me of the sounds I had heard in coming, and of the coach that turned off by the cross-roads, and I had no doubt that 'twas the carriage which carried Delia.

I ran round to the stables ; the groom who had been sent to seek me was in one of the empty stalls with a lantern. He did not know where the coach had gone,

having been sent up the drive to set the gates open while the young lady was getting into the coach. She had taken her maid and the footboy with her. Certainly the coach had turned towards Maplehurst. I told him to saddle a couple of horses and put on his coat to accompany me, and this order he obeyed with such alacrity—being a strong young fellow and eager for adventure, like most of his kind—that by the time I had been to the house and assured Miss Dobson, whom I had frightened to the last degree by my inconsiderate expression of my fears, that I should overtake Delia before she had covered a dozen miles of ground, the horses were out and he struggling into his coat.

I determined, before reaching the cross-roads, to turn in the direction of Tenterden, being convinced that Lord Kestral had made for Hythe, Dover, or some other port

from which he might embark as soon as he had got Delia under the influence of her mother; and this conclusion was further confirmed in my mind by learning from a carrier, whom we met some two miles on our way, that he had encountered a coach and pair going in the direction of Tenterden some ten or twenty minutes before. With this encouragement I gave my horse two or three sharp cuts—for the careful beast would not voluntarily advance at more than a walking pace—and in consequence was nearly thrown by his stumbling upon a heap of stones laid by the roadside.

The character of the night had not altered. There was not a breath of wind to lift the thick vapour that clung to the earth. One could see nothing beyond the horse's head, not because the night was dark, but that the mist was impenetrable:

when we passed near a thicket or a stack the grey was a shade darker, but even the outlines of the hedges were undiscernible. The groom's eyes were keener to detect the slight indications of objects than mine.

'There be barns or houses, or some'at alongside now,' he said, stopping his horse. He threw himself off, and with the bridle in his hand, went to the side.

'Houses!' said he.

He knocked at the door at my bidding, and hammered away vigorously at short intervals, until a window was pushed open, and a voice demanded angrily who knocked.

I explained what I wanted to know, but the fellow I addressed either had seen neither the coach nor the post-chaise, or was too surly to satisfy my curiosity, and presently slammed to the window, and so finished the colloquy.

‘Lor’ a mussy only knows where we are,’ said the groom, getting into his saddle.

We pushed on again, and to my great satisfaction, shortly came to a turnpike, where I learnt that a coach with two young women inside had recently passed, and that early in the morning a post-chaise had stopped, and he had been requested to give a glass of water to a lady who seemed mighty sick.

‘An’ a pretty gentleman she had for a nuss, too,’ he added; ‘the lady was running down with perspiration, but just because a spot or two of rain was falling, he would take and have the glasses up, as must have been more out o’ spite than for his own comfort, seeing as a Calcutty black-hole is fools to a po’shay with the windows up of a day like this; but, Lord, sir! there’s some men as can’t bear with sick women—seems to think

they fall ill a-purpose to aggravate 'em, and——'

I did not wait to hear the end of the pike-keeper's philosophy, but again urged my horse into a trot, impatient of delay. We went on for the best part of an hour, and then, the mist growing thinner, we could see about us with tolerable facility. We came to an inn, where a light was still burning. I leapt off my horse, and ran into the house.

The landlord declared that no vehicle, except a carrier's waggon, had passed the house in the last three hours, and he was equally certain that no post-chaise had passed during the day.

'There's not a thing as goes on wheels passes without my seeing of it. 'Tis part of my business,' he said, in corroboration. 'If they passed the pike, they must ha' turned up towards Tunbridge, or turned down towards Ashford.'

‘And where are the roads?’ I asked, in vexation.

‘Why, you must ha’ passed them at the pike,’ he replied, seeming much amused by my mischance. ‘That’s just where the pike is, to be sure—at the cross-roads.’

‘Two hours lost,’ thought I, as I threw my leg over the saddle. We returned to the toll-gate at a gallop; and though I felt sure that the coach had taken the Ashford road—which now, owing to the clearing of the mist, was obvious enough—I thought it well to put the question to the toll-keeper before going farther:

‘To be sure they went down there,’ he said sullenly; ‘and if you’d had the civility to say good-night, instead of scampering off in the middle of my observations, I’d a took the trouble to holler after you, but as——’

I gave him a curse, and we went on

again, taking the Ashford Road, and not to protract this part of my narrative, we passed through that village a little after two in the morning at the top of our speed, having obtained by the way certain information relative to those I sought which gave a new turn to my fears.

Just beyond the village was a farmhouse by the roadside. Lights were in two of the windows ; there was a light also in an out-building a little removed from the house ; the coach stood in the road. The coachman and the footboy came to meet us, the coachman having recognised the sound of his horse's hoofs. They began to speak both together—what they said I know not. I was off my horse in an instant, and throwing back the wicket, ran up the path, and entered the house by the half-open door.

Not a soul was visible. A faint glim-

mering of light from above showed me the stairs. As I was running up, a piercing scream broke the silence. I groped my way across the landing and came upon a passage: half-way down, a feeble light came through an open door. I entered the room. A rushlight burned upon the chimney-piece. At the further end of the room an open door, communicating with another chamber, showed a second light. Was it from that room the scream came? Not from this, clearly. There was not a sound—not a murmur. A great bed, with heavy dark curtains, stood out from the wall. I took the rushlight from the chimney-piece and went towards it. The coverlet showed the outline of a motionless figure. I drew back the heavy curtain. The turning of the sheet was thrown upwards over a face. I knew not what to expect—I only was conscious that I must

see whose face was covered, even if my wildest fear was to be confirmed. I turned back the sheet, holding the rushlight near. Two sightless eyes stared up at me from a face all black and hideously distorted. I flung the sheet back in indescribable horror. And then, as I stood there in the awful silence like one paralyzed, a scream pierced my ears again. It came from the adjoining room. Stepping back, I looked through the open door into the adjoining chamber. My uncle lay stretched upon the floor. But for his dress and figure, I might have doubted if it were he. His face, purple, and stained here and there with black blotches, was puffed and swollen out of recognition. His waistcoat and shirt were torn open, his wig was cast aside, he rolled his bald head from side to side upon the bare boards. His arms were stretched upwards and his bony hands clenched in

agony. As I looked, he writhed in pain and screamed again. A faint plaintive echo seemed to rise from the opposite side of the bed by which I stood. I ran round, shielding the light with my hand; as I drew my palm back, I saw Delia cowering by the wall, upon her knees, with her face buried in her hands.

‘Delia!’ I cried, setting down the light and raising her in my arms. ‘Delia! What do you do here?’

She looked about her in a scared, bewildered manner, and then, pointing to the bed, she said :

‘Mother!’

I half carried her down the stairs—for she was powerless to resist, and got her out to the carriage in which she had come, and lifted her into it.

‘Where is the maid you brought with your mistress?’ I asked of the coachman.

‘Lord knows, sir. She flew away like a mad thing when she heard the plague was in the house.’

‘Has a doctor been sent for?’

‘The farmer went off to Tenterden to find one soon after we arrived, sir.’

I pulled out my purse, and asked who would go into the house and stay beside my uncle until the doctor arrived. After some hesitation, the groom who had come with me volunteered for the service. I gave him the purse, saw him enter the house, and then, bidding the coachman drive at once to the Hall, I stepped into the coach beside my trembling Delia.

She threw her arms about my neck, and pressing her face against my breast, burst into an agony of tears.

‘Oh, my darling! Comfort me, comfort me!’ she cried.

* * * * *

Here let me end the hideous part of my narrative, and as briefly as possible. My uncle died before the doctor from Tenterden arrived. Drench found time to ride over to Ashford the following day, and satisfy his professional curiosity. 'I have never seen the like before,' said he, 'and I hope never to see it again. I can give the disease no name. The appearances are precisely those recorded of the Black Death—a plague which seized upon hale men, and killed them in the space of three hours. It is no wonder that your uncle, debilitated by the excitement and mortification of the morning, and boxed up for hours in that post-chaise with his wife, was infected. It was an awful retribution.'



CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH FALKLAND CONCLUDES HIS STORY.

MY anxieties did not end with that terrible night. For some time afterwards Delia was confined to her room, partly by physical prostration, but chiefly by the peremptory orders of Drench. But, thanks to her excellent constitution, her condition was not at any time such as to give us serious apprehension, and our fears were happily outweighed by our hopes. After a few days she was able to receive visits, seated in her bed like any grand madam, much to the satisfaction of the

ladies of the neighbourhood, who, to their credit, showed themselves as eager to do justice to Delia as they had been hasty to do her injustice. It seemed as if they could not, to their own mind, sufficiently testify their regret for the rash judgment by which they had condemned Davie and Delia. They laid the fault to their husbands, as their husbands laid the fault to them. Never did pagan goddess receive more offerings of flowers and fruit; and to these were added pots of cream, sweetmeats, cakes, and anything in the making of which the good housewives excelled. They generally came with something to give, and always with a great deal to say. Delia, whose sweet disposition was untainted with the slightest sentiment of animosity, forgave them freely, and was glad to get away from the subject of their regrets to matters on which she could congratulate her visitors,

and showed such a lively interest in the art of making cakes, whipping cream, preserving fruit, and pickling, that everyone declared she would make the very best housewife in the world, and all thanked their stars that she was not one of your fashionable, fingle-fangle fine ladies. For since the exposure of Lady Kestral's character, a complete change had taken place in the minds of these ladies—the example being set by Squire Humphrey's lady and her daughters, who no sooner heard that they were in danger of being taken with a real illness, than they gave over feigning fictitious disorders, and, instead of lying a-bed until mid-day, rose at cock-crow, and declared one and all that they had never felt so hearty in their lives, and would never be so foolish as to give up their simple country habits for the contemptible airs and graces of fine London madams. This exemplary

intention was due perhaps as much to Squire Humphrey's determined action as to their own inclinations.

Miss Dobson allowed me to see Delia every day for ten minutes, and I never saw any picture which could compare with my love, as she sat in her snowy nightdress, with its soft frilled tucker, a coquettish little reception-cap on her head, and a tinge of pink reflected from the ribbons and silk with which the curtains of her bed were decorated, lending to her cheek just that glow of health which I so fervently prayed nature would presently give to it. It may have been a modest blush, and not the reflection of the ribbons; for her eyes twinkled prettily, and rose and fell in a charming confusion when I bent to kiss her hand there.

Heaven be thanked, I took her always good news of Davie's progress, and this con-

tributed to her recovery. As I have said, I am no actor, and my face never led her to doubt of the truth of my reports. When we parted, she would lean towards me and just touch my lips with hers, which set such fires to my heart as nought could quench. For hours and hours I walked on the lawn, happy to look at the window of the room in which she lay.

At length Davie was carried from the inn to the Hall, and, being none the worse for the journey—Drench being careful to a ridiculous degree that no premature exertion should cause a relapse—he allowed Delia the following day to leave her room and visit him. I took her downstairs, holding her around the waist—for I could not content myself with her hand—and she in frank love put her arm about my neck, and behind Miss Dobson's back we paused upon our way to kiss again and again.

Davie was seated by the open window, looking over the beautiful weald. When he saw us he rose, throwing off Drench's hand—for the doctor would have held him—and having embraced Delia, took our two hands and held them together in his in silent emotion.

'Doctor,' said he, when our gratulations were at an end, 'when may I leave this room?'

'I should say—if you don't over-excite yourself, and obey my orders—you could be carried by easy stages to some healthy, invigorating spot by the sea, and there take as much exercise as will moderately fatigue you, in about a week or so. I fancy Brithelmstone will be the best place for you.'


'Brithelmstone be it, if there is e'er a church in it.'

'A church I' exclaimed Delia.

And, in truth, the stipulation seemed to

me a curious one ; for though Davie loved to go to church every Sunday, I thought he might dispense with the office for a season.

‘Aye,’ said Davie ; ‘a church where you and Mr. Falkland may be wedded ; for, look ye, sir,’ he added, turning to me, ‘you promised to marry Delia without delay if I was killed in the duel, and I think you will hardly have the heart to make me wish I had been, by putting off your marriage for the pitiful consideration of pounds and pence. I know you’ve that on the end of your tongue : you’ve been hinting at it this last week ; but I’ll listen to no rubbish of independence and the like again. We’ve had too many unavoidable troubles to add others to them which may be set aside. Come, sir, say you’ll marry Delia at this Brithelmstone, wherever it may be ?’



‘ With all my heart ! ’ I cried.

And Delia, with her eyes downcast, yet smiling sweetly, nodded her head.

But when she got the better of her confusion, she said she would like to be married at the church in the village, where we had first met ; and there, by a special licence, we were married the following week.

’Twas quite a quiet wedding, by reason of Lady Kestral’s recent death ; but in her simple dress my Delia looked more lovable, more beautiful than a queen tricked out in all the splendour of the grandest ceremony. To their inexpressible delight, the Misses Humphrey bore the part of bridesmaids. Drench was my right-hand man.

The story of my love for Delia began at that church and ends there ; but the love itself is unending.

THE END.

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